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NEW  
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# NEW SECRET

by

LILLIAN BEYNON THOMAS

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TO  
MY HUSBAND

Whose interest in world affairs has  
been a constant inspiration to me.

541902

*Are you in earnest? Seize this very minute:  
What you can do, or dream you can, begin it;  
Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.  
Only engage and then the mind grows heated;  
Begin and then the work will be completed.*

—Goethe.

## I

"DUTCH, where are you?" Bob Harrow's deep voice preceded him into the kitchen of their new farm home.

From the front of the house came a clear young voice, with a lilt in it. "Just a moment, dear."

Bob hung his hat on the rack in the back entrance and looked at his mother who was standing beside the electric stove, making gravy. "You know, Mother, I can scarcely realize I'm at home—that this is my home."

His mother half turned toward him, a large spoon in her hand. "Dutch wondered about that; all the articles in the newspapers and magazines said the men from overseas wanted to find everything at home just as they left it."

Bob's large mouth puckered into a grin. He put his arm around his mother's shoulders, "All I wanted was to find the folks the same." He tightened his arm and touched his lips to her forehead.

A moisture came into Mrs. Harrow's eyes as she looked up at him, "All we wanted was to have you back again, son." She tried to pat his arm, quite forgetting the gravy spoon.

"Here! Here!" Bob caught her arm. "I want that gravy on my plate, not on my pants."

"Go on with you!" His mother gave him a shove and sniffed, "Call your father. He's in the garden. Supper is ready."

Bob started for the door, but there he stopped, looked back and called, "Where are you, Dutch? What are you doing?"

"I'm coming, dear."

"What is that girl doing?" Bob looked at his mother. "Every once in awhile she disappears into that front room. When I go to find her she looks flustered and when I ask her what she's doing, she says, 'Nothing'."

"Well, if she says she isn't, I guess she isn't," Mrs. Harrow said, as she poured the rich brown gravy into the gravy bowl. "Now, get your father."

Mrs. Harrow leaned back to make sure Bob had disappeared before she called. "You'd better come, Dutch. I'm taking up the supper and Bob's gone for his father."

There was a quick patter of light footsteps and Dutch hurried into the kitchen, her manner a little breathless.

"There isn't a thing in that article about soldiers talking like Bob does," she explained in a secretive voice. "But the writer says over and over that the thing to do is to agree with the returned men, no matter how wildly they talk. We must just jolly them along until they act normal again. Pretend we don't notice anything."

"Hump!" Mrs. Harrow grunted. She put down the gravy bowl and rested her hands on her hips. "There's nothing very jolly about the way Bob's talking. He says we're all going to be blown to smithereens—the very earth itself and all of us—inside of ten years, unless we change our ways, and he wants to begin changing right now."

"It's that atomic bomb did something to Bob." Little Dutch took a roast turkey out of the warming oven. "He was like the other boys from overseas until they sent him to work in that laboratory in New Mexico."

"I guess that was enough to upset anybody," Mrs. Harrow agreed as she followed Little Dutch into the dining room with the gravy and dish of potatoes.

"It's wonderful to have Bob here to sit at the head of his own table." Little Dutch's face was glowing as she put down the turkey and stepped back.

Bob Harrow's wife was a short, slight girl, whose

outstanding characteristics were her great abundance of shining brown hair and her large, almost black eyes. Her features were regular and her complexion was good. There did not seem to be any reason why she was not beautiful, but she was not. However, she had charm. Her face sparkled like one who had a bright fire within, and she had around her an atmosphere of warmth, goodwill and competence that drew people to her.

Her nick-name, Little Dutch or just Dutch, came from her manner of walking. She carried herself almost rigidly erect. She said she had to, she was so short. At school, Bob Harrow had called her the Little Duchess. The name stuck, but became Little Dutch or just Dutch.

"Yes, it is wonderful to have Bob back and not much changed," Bob's mother agreed.

"Would you like to serve the gravy and we'll let Dad serve the potatoes?" Dutch asked. "I'll serve the cauliflower and the beets." She was arranging the table as she asked.

"Here we come, hungry as refugees," Bob called, to the accompaniment of his father's crutches picking off bits of the gravelled walk as they approached the house.

"You hid the articles?" Mrs. Harrow asked.

"Oh, yes!" Little Dutch spoke a bit breathlessly as if life were going so fast she could scarcely keep up. "Nearly every writer says we must never let a

returned man know we consider he is not quite normal."

"I should think not," Bob's mother said firmly, but even as she spoke her voice flattened and faded and she added, "It isn't easy for a husband and wife who are in love to keep their thoughts from each other."

Bob Harrow looked around his table—Little Dutch opposite—his mother to his right and his father to his left. He drew a long deep breath. "I dreamed about this so often, pictured it, when one side of me said it couldn't come true, that I have to pinch myself to make sure it's really so—that I won't waken up and find myself in a fox hole in mud and filth and danger."

"I know how that was in the Great War," Bob's father began.

Bob's merry spontaneous laugh interrupted him. He and his father had already had several arguments about their respective wars. One argument had centered around Robert Harrow, Bob's father, calling his war the Great War.

Bob plunged right into the discussion again. "You call your war the Great War, Dad. Your war was merely warming up the engine for the take off."

"And what would you say your war was, son?" Robert Harrow asked.

"Just a few preliminary operations before the real war begins," Bob picked up the carving knife

and fork, in response to Dutch's insistent pointing at the turkey. "What do you want, dear?"

"I want you to make immediate war on that turkey or the dinner will be cold," Dutch said firmly.

Everyone laughed and Robert Harrow said, "I thought this was supper. Farmers have dinner at noon."

As Bob began to carve the turkey he said, "If we work the farm we'll have dinner at noon, won't we, Dutch?"

"Whatever you want, dear," Dutch was stretching to see what he was serving, as she warned, "Don't forget the dressing."

"Oh, yes, by jove, that's for you, Mother; you like dressing, don't you?"

"Yes, thank you, I do." Mrs. Harrow was looking at her son. "I thought you had definitely decided to work the farm, Bob?"

"That's what I thought." Mr. Harrow echoed his wife. "Why did you work your head off getting this house built, Dutch, if you are not going to live in it?"

"Dutch thought she was going to live in it," Bob said with a short laugh, "but she's a perfect little wife. If her husband changes his mind, she changes hers."

"Don't be too sure she'll always change it." Little Dutch's laugh was very youthful and merry. She looked at Bob's mother. "We have to humor the

returned soldier a bit. I'm sure you humored Dad when he came back from the Great War."

At that they all laughed again. Dutch chattered on and turned their attention to the dinner, but the conversation seemed to flow around an unseen guest who was waiting to break in with something disturbing.

It was Mr. Harrow who opened the door, when he said, "When I was over there in the Great War, I didn't know for a year or two what I would do when I came back—if I did come back. Then suddenly, I knew. I wanted Mother and this farm. I got my legs pretty badly shot up but that didn't change me and it didn't change Mother. She brightened up the old place with a bit of paint here and there and she got a radio and car. Do you remember, Mother, how reckless we thought we were?"

"Do I?" Mrs. Harrow laughed. "Do I remember how reckless the neighbors thought we were?"

Robert Harrow chuckled. "But we gave you a pretty fair home, Bob, better than we had."

"You sure did," Bob agreed. "Here's a drum stick, Dad. You always liked that."

"Sure do," Mr. Harrow agreed, but he went right on talking. "Then, when this war went on so long and we got sick and couldn't work the farm and rented it, your mother and I about broke our hearts. So when you wrote and said you wanted the farm and so did Little Dutch, we took it as an answer to prayer."

Bob, who had served everyone and was eating his dinner explained. "I wrote that when I was overseas, then they brought me back here to work on the atomic bomb. I couldn't tell you, not even Dutch, what I was doing in New Mexico."

"I knew when I went down to spend the week-end with you that it was something terribly important." Dutch said, her eyes very large with the thought of it.

Bob looked at his father. "Dad, that atomic bomb is the most tremendous thing that has ever happened. We'll have to live differently, think differently or we're headed straight for suicide. This old earth has reached a dead end. Man can destroy that on which we live and from which we get our life. Man can blow this earth and man himself to smithereens."

"Steady, son! Steady! Calm down." Robert Harrow spoke soothingly.

"Eat your dinner, son." Mrs. Harrow advised comfortably. "Likely the scientists will find something to counteract it."

"Counteract it!" Bob knew his voice had risen, but they seemed so unaware of the tremendous significance of what had happened that he wanted to shout at them—to drive it home to them in some way they could not dodge.

It was not that he knew so much about it, but he had taken a couple of years science at the

University of Minnesota before he went overseas. He had done very well, extra well. In fact, his teachers said he was brilliant. That was why he had been sent back to work on the bomb.

"I can't calm down," he said, "and you wouldn't either, father, if you understood what has happened."

"You always were excitable, Bob." Mrs. Harrow interrupted. "You get an idea and you go right off the deep end. You just keep steady, son, and things will right themselves."

"I think father would like some more turkey," Little Dutch was trying to see what was on Bob's father's plate.

"I beg your pardon, Dad. Have some more of this bird?"

"Well, just a bit of dressing."

It seemed to Bob that his father really did not want any more of the turkey but eating seemed a normal thing to do and he wished to do something as normal as possible, to steady him.

He looked at Little Dutch, "You don't think I'm crazy, do you, dear?"

Her great dark eyes opened very wide. She looked anxiously at him and breathed more than said, "I think you're the most sensible man on earth."

"Good gosh!" Bob flushed and muttered. "You have gone too far to the left, I can't measure up to that, Kid." But he felt a warm wave of confidence go through him. Little Dutch would stand back of

him no matter how queer he might appear to others. Not that he expected her to understand how he felt, but she did not need to. Her love was deep enough to cloak all his strange thoughts and sink to the inner core of him. She had a love for him that did not need to understand; it just was, and it gave him the strength he felt would carry him through the difficult time ahead.

So it was with an easy assurance that he said, "When I wrote from overseas and said I wanted to take over the farm, I reckon I felt like you did, Dad, when you were sickened by slaughter and misery. I wanted something sure and dependable, the land and Little Dutch. They seemed so pure and clean and simple and unchanging."

"Just the way I felt," Robert Harrow agreed.

Bob dropped his knife and fork on his plate with a clatter. He leaned back. "But since I saw where we let off that bomb I've lost all confidence in the earth. Man can destroy it and what man can do, he does. That's the history of life."

"Well, what do you want to do about it?" Mr. Harrow rested his elbows on the table, his knife and fork straight up in the air.

"I want people to stop and think. It will take something drastic. I want manufacturers to stop making goods; I want farmers to stop sowing seed; I want men and women to refuse to bring children into the world until we face the fact that straight

ahead is suicide for the world; or a getting together of all men, according to some principle not yet discovered."

Mrs. Harrow wiped her mouth with her serviette. "You haven't changed, Bob. You always were a crusader." Her eyes narrowed, she tapped her fingers on the table. "We've always had a preacher or a politician in the family."

"What do you think would bring folks, all folks, together?" Mr. Harrow waved his knife and fork for attention.

"I don't know," Bob began to eat his dinner. "I don't know, but I do know that the one animal on earth we know the least about, is man. I believe that if we knew man, we could find a unifying principle that would save humanity. I'm going to study man."

"Father, do put down your knife and fork. You make me nervous."

Bob winced. His mother's voice went through him like a cross-cut saw. She had been only half listening and not thinking at all about what he had said. He looked at Dutch. She was scraping the remnants off his mother's plate into hers. Then she put the soiled plates one on top of the other. She met his eyes. "Have you finished, dear?"

"Yes. Can I help you?"

"No thanks! Your mother and I have a surprise for you. Hand me your plate and Dad's."

When the kitchen door closed after Little Dutch

and Mrs. Harrow, Bob said. "I guess I'm a dashed fool, Dad. Here I have everything set for a mighty fine life as long as things last. Why can't I drift along, let come what may?"

Mr. Harrow wet his lips several times before he managed to say, "Maybe you saw too many die, hoping they'd done something worthwhile."

Before Bob could reply, his mother came in with a pumpkin pie, piled high with whipped cream.

Following her was Little Dutch, with an angel cake and a block of ice cream.

"My favorite desserts," Bob shouted, his eyes sparkling. "Is this home or am I in heaven?"

Dutch's big questioning eyes met his. "Maybe a bit of both," she said seriously.

Bob and Dutch were finishing washing the dishes, when Robert Harrow put his head into the kitchen to say, "Reverend Emerson and his wife are coming up the lane."

"Who is the Reverend Emerson?" Bob asked, as he tossed the dish towel over the rack.

Dutch, who was running the dish cloth around the inside of the dishpan, gave it a quick wring and emptied the pan into the sink. "I told you about him. He took Mr. Hawkins' place when Hawkins went overseas."

"Yes, I remember," Bob was washing his hands. "You said you liked him and his wife very much?"

"Everybody does," Little Dutch hung up the dishpan and peeked into a mirror that hung over the sink. "You'll like him, too."

Bob grinned. "You know, I never was partial to preachers. I'm less so now."

"I know," Dutch put a bit of rouge on her cheeks. "But Mr. Emerson is not like any ministers you know."

"How do you know the kind of ministers I know?" Bob put his arm around her and drew her very close to him.

Dutch raised her face toward him, a saucy twist on her sensitive lips, "I know a lot more about you than you think I do."

Bob grinned down at her. "I hope you do, because I haven't got myself quite sized up since that experience in New Mexico. It did something to me."

Dutch's arm went up and around his neck. "I guess it did something to everybody in the world who heard about it." She pulled his lips down toward hers. "No matter what happens, we have each other."

Bob held back, looking very hard into her eyes. "Promise that, Dutch. Promise that no matter what happens we will always have each other."

"Of course I'll promise that, silly." She held him close. "What could come between us?"

Bob's mother opened the door from the dining room. "Dutch, Mr. and Mrs. Emerson are right here."

Bob caught Dutch's hand, "Don't leave me with them. I don't want to talk religion."

Dutch caught, held his hand and pulled him forward. "Come on. I don't think they'll talk religion. Anyhow, you'll like them."

"Then you were in New Mexico? You helped set off that trial atomic bomb? You saw what it did?" Reverend Emerson was leaning forward in his chair, one hand on the head of his cane, the other gripping his knee. His thin white hair was every way, and his tie, a bright purple, was awry. His grey suit, that looked worn, was unpressed, but in his dark unfaded eyes there was a deep fire that glowed and gave youth to his face.

"Yes, I was there," Bob said. "I saw what it did."

"It must have been tremendous," Reverend Emerson drew a long breath. "Did you feel as if you'd burst? As if you couldn't stand it? As if it was too big?" His voice had begun to rise. He was breathing fast.

"That was it exactly." Bob felt the color coming into his face. He felt his excitement rising. He tried to hold it down. He didn't want this man to tell him to calm down. He didn't want this fellow to treat him like a returned man who had to be humored, because his nerves were bad.

Reverend Emerson jumped to his feet. He began to walk up and down. He stopped in front of Bob,

leaned both hands on his cane. "You didn't know what would happen? You were going to do something that had never been done before, a first thing—a first attack on the earth itself. It must have been tremendous. It must have been almost too much."

"It was," Bob said simply. "We didn't know whether the explosion would stop at the bounds we had set. It might set off the atoms around; it might burn up," he laughed self-consciously, "It might blow up the whole earth."

Bob was on his feet now. He went and opened the door. He stepped outside. Reverend Emerson followed him. Bob thought, "Now he'll try to calm me down. He'll talk to me about having faith. He'll—"

Reverend Emerson walked well out into the yard. It was almost sunset. Shadows of trees and shrubs lay like dark thoughts across the lawn. Clouds were rolling up from the east. Here and there an angry sun splashed them with blood-red paint. An ill-tempered wind had begun to whistle through the autumn leaves that were clinging with weak fingers, begging for one more day of life.

"You lived big," Reverend Emerson muttered. "You lived almost too big. I don't believe I could have borne it. Did it do something to you?"

"Yes," Bob said without any hesitation. "It did something to me. I don't know what yet." He stood thinking, unconscious of those around him. Then he

raised his head slowly and looked at the minister. "I was brought up on a farm. I loved the land. When everything overseas seemed drenched in blood and filth and misery, I could see this farm and Little Dutch. I held on to that picture. I said inside me, 'There's something a fellow can depend on. I'll keep steady, thinking about the farm and Little Dutch. There is something that won't change'."

He walked over and picked up a handful of the rich well-cultivated garden soil. As it trickled through his fingers he continued, "Then they sent me to New Mexico. After a time I saw where the first atomic bomb had been. I realized then we could no longer depend on the earth. We had filched its secret from it. It was then I lost faith in the future. Unless we can discover an entirely new set of values and—we haven't much time."

Bob's father, who had been standing resting on his crutch and puffing on his cold pipe, hit the bowl against his crutch and it gave out a hollow sound, as he muttered. "I pretty well lost the use of my legs in the Great War that, I believed, was a war to end war. You say you've lost faith in the future in a war to save democracy? You think the next generation would lose—lose?"

"It's reason!" Bob interjected. "Only madmen and devils could survive the next war. Already militarists are pointing out that people will have to burrow underground, but scientists know that would

be useless. We know the earth. Destruction would follow them underground. That's why we must find something in man himself to save humanity."

Reverend Emerson walked up and down, his cane hitting the gravel. "You may be right. It's almost too much. It's almost too big!" He stopped. "You saw where the bomb went off?"

"Yes, I saw it," Bob threw out his hands. "I can't describe it. Tons of earth, rocks, stones, vegetation—gone, gone. Desolation, vile poisonous odors left. That was all."

"Big! Tremendous! Awful! Terrible! Reverend Emerson said. Then his voice changed and he added, "or maybe it was Wonderful! Glorious! Magnificent!"

He held out his hand to Bob. "I'm glad to have met you. Thanks for telling me of your experience." He glanced towards the clouds. "Come, mother, we'd better be going. A storm is blowing up."

Right behind him, Mr. and Mrs. Harrow and Mrs. Emerson were standing. Mrs. Harrow said, "You should preach a sermon about the atomic bomb, Mr. Emerson."

"Hope I'll be able to some day," Reverend Emerson said, "but I'm not ready yet. I'll have to do a lot of thinking before I attempt that." He began to walk in a circle.

"Now, don't get excited, Joseph," Mrs. Emerson went to his side, put her hand through his arm and began to walk with him.

"I am excited," he said. "This is big. Into man's hands has been given the power to destroy the very earth we stand on." He kept on walking until he was in front of the waiting group. Then he stopped. "You've read about that minister in England who refused to celebrate the peace because of the use of the atomic bomb. Well, that fellow had been thinking, but he hadn't found the solution." He planted his feet, threw up his fine white head and squared his shoulders. With his face turned toward the stormy sky, the wind tugging at his hair, he seemed to speak, not to those listening, but to the Universe. "I believe in a God, I believe the purpose of creation is good, but I can't place this thing. Why did this happen now? I can't place it yet. I'm all upset. I'm in the dark. I can't see through, but there's an answer. There's an answer!"

It was Robert Harrow, who had been lipping his cold pipe, who said prosaically, "There's power enough in one atom they say, to combine my whole harvest, forever."

Reverend Emerson turned on him. "We don't need power. We have more power now than we can use, Robert. We have more power in the arms and backs of men and women than we can use. We have unemployment, haven't we? There's no sense—I beg your pardon, Robert. This thing is tremendous!" He turned to Bob. "You've got me started, Bob. Perhaps you'll come over and talk to me about it?"

"I'd like nothing better," Bob again shook his hand. "Perhaps I'd better take you over in the car."

"No thanks. I want to feel the wind, to fight it. You all right, mother?"

"I can do anything you can," Mrs. Emerson said with a chuckle. "What about you, Mrs. Harrow?"

Bob's mother laughed. "I can walk as far and as fast as you can, Mrs. Emerson."

Bob grinned. "That just leaves you, Dad. Do you want me to drive you home?"

"I can outwalk any of them." Robert Harrow took long swings on his crutches, that soon outdistanced them all as he led the way down the road, across the prairie to the little settlement beside the highway, to which the Harrow family had given their name.

Dutch, looking into the grate fire, said, "Strange the way Mr. Emerson acted. He seemed excited, unsure of himself. I never saw him like that before. He upset me more than the bomb did."

"He has been feeling this thing," Bob said and added, "I like that man. Did you say he is stationed here?"

"Just for the duration." Dutch put another stick on the fire. "He had retired, but he came here when Mr. Hawkins went overseas and we had no one. Both he and his wife have been a great blessing to us. She was a nurse. We've all been hoping Mr. Hawkins wouldn't come back."

"We'll have to do something about it," Bob said as he drew Dutch down on the chesterfield beside him. "Couldn't we get Hawkins something that looks a little more important or has a bit more salary?"

Dutch snuggled down against him. "I'm afraid that wouldn't help. Mr. Emerson has retired. Someone younger, coming back, will want this place."

"That's the way we do things," Bob said. "As soon as a man becomes mellow and as full of wisdom as a human ever gets, we sidetrack him and take on some greenhorn who doesn't know any more, and often not as much as we do. Power is all we value; wisdom we ignore. Such waste is a crime."

Dutch laughed, "You are a grouch!"

"Yes, aren't I?" Bob pillowed her head against him. "But the atomic bomb is going to change that. We'll have so much power we'll soon be reducing the retiring age to fifty, maybe forty or thirty. A few callow youths will do the work of the world."

"What will people do then?" Dutch asked lazily.

"Fight, I suppose," Bob said crisply. "That's what people usually do when they get bored."

"But isn't war over? Hasn't the atomic bomb finished war?" Dutch straightened up.

"Why should it?" Bob pulled her back into his arms. "Human beings have always used their power to destroy when they wished to injure anyone, or wanted anything others had, and there are always folks like that with us."

"But, Bob," Dutch faced him. "Do you really believe those bombs might destroy the whole of America—make it uninhabitable?"

"I do believe it. I not only believe they can, but I believe they will, unless men stop and change their desires. That's why I've invited Nat Willis to come and spend the winter here. He will look after things while we go to Minneapolis. I want to take a course in psychology."

"Psychology?" Dutch sounded questioning. "Science—you mean, don't you, dear?"

"No. There's lots for scientists to do. They should get busy now and create a new world. Maybe they will."

Bob's eyes began to shine. He got up and walked to the hearth. He gripped the edge of the mantel until his knuckles stood out white as he said, "But we haven't time. Right now is the race between civilization and suicide. We must find something in man himself—some unifying principle that has been missed. That is why I'm going to study psychology."

Dutch did not speak for some time. Bob was wondering if she was thinking his nerves were upset. Was she thinking she'd have to be patient with him? However, what she said was, "Who is Nat Willis? I rather like his name."

"He was a pal of mine in the army." There was a grin in Bob's voice. "You'll like Nat. Maybe not at first, but later. He's a peculiar fellow. He was raised

on a farm. He is pretty well used up with shrapnel, but his folks are all dead. He needs outdoor life without too much work. This will suit him fine. He failed on his final examination for his degree in medicine. He is much interested in cancer research. He thinks when we discover what cancer is we'll know what life is."

"I think I'd like him," Dutch said.

"Are you disappointed at leaving the new house, darling?"

Dutch sank a bit lower in the chesterfield. "Maybe, a wee bit," she confessed.

"You did a splendid job getting this home built." Bob looked around. "Mother says you nearly killed yourself to have it ready for my return."

"Killed myself!" Dutch scoffed. "I never felt so much alive."

Bob fixed his eyes broodingly on her. "Mother painted the old house, got new furniture for the living room and bought a radio and a car when Dad was coming home from his war. You built a new house, got in water and electricity, and refurnished it all for my return. If we have a son, he'll come home to a hole in the ground, if he comes at all." He sprang up, grabbed the tongs and poked the fire. "I'll be damned if I'll raise a son for that."

They were interrupted by the telephone. Bob answered. "That was Nat. He's coming right out."

"So soon?" Dutch asked involuntarily.

"Yes, dear. Do you mind?"

With an evident effort Dutch threw off an inward rebellion. Her face cleared. "Certainly not if you want him. That will be our good deed."

"It will be a good deed all right!" Bob spoke with feeling. "Where will we put him?"

"Come, and I'll show you. I guess you didn't half see the house when we went through with your mother and father." She caught his hand and led him out of the living room that ran across one side of the house, into the center hall. In the front, opposite the living room was a large bedroom. Next came the bathroom and then a smaller bedroom. Back of that was a tiny kitchen with a dinette. A stairs went up from the hall.

"Just like a city bungalow," Bob said when they had gone through it again. "It's so perfect, I can hardly believe it's my home. Let's look at Nat's room again." He stood for some time. "He'll like that bookcase. He'll have books. He can write at that table. Have you a comfortable chair you could put in where he can lounge and smoke, and be alone? A fellow who has been over there needs a place where he can be alone."

Dutch glanced toward the stair door. "There is one upstairs, I think might do."

"What have you up there?"

"Lots of things," Dutch laughed. "Go up and

get what you want. I've shut it off until we need more room."

Bob, who had reached the second step up, stopped and turned. He looked strangely at Dutch, then went on.

"What is it, Bob?" she asked, but he did not reply.

Nat Willis expressed himself as delighted with his new home. "It's just great," he said, after he had been introduced to Dutch and taken over the house by Bob and finally brought back to his room. "Are you sure this is all right, Bob?" he asked a bit anxiously as he sprawled his six feet in the large leather chair Bob had brought from upstairs. "I'm quite sure Dutch didn't count on me."

Bob laughed. "Of course she didn't, but she's the most adaptable girl I ever knew. She's going to be just as glad to have you as I am, when she has time to think it over. I've told her what I've planned to do."

Nat took his pipe out of his pocket. He looked at Bob, "All right to smoke?"

"Sure thing." Bob moved an ash tray closer.

Dutch appeared at the door. "I have a cup of tea ready," she said. "It's in the dinette. I serve company in the living room, but I'm making you one of the family already, Nat."

"Thank you," Nat said as he followed her.

"Do you like tea, Nat?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Or coffee? I made both."

"Yes, thank you."

"But which?" Dutch's hand hovered over cups and saucers.

"It doesn't matter."

A slight expression of puzzlement came into Dutch's face. "I wish you'd say."

"Out of the pot you have your hand on," Nat said consideringly.

As Dutch passed him a cup of coffee, she asked, "Why did you choose that pot?"

He smiled slightly, "It was handy."

She looked puzzled but changed the subject. "Did you have a pleasant trip out?"

"Yes, very pleasant, thank you," he said.

Bob, who had gone to the kitchen for hot water, returned. "Rotten travelling, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's rotten travelling," Nat agreed.

Dutch changed the subject again. "Do you like country life?"

"Yes, very much," Nat said.

"Rats!" Bob laughed. "You don't care a hoot for it."

Nat laughed lightly with a boyish grin. "No, I guess I don't care much for it."

Dutch looked curiously at him. "I hope you'll be happy here, Nat."

"Sure, I'll be happy here," he said heartily.

Bob who was shoving a chair back into place jeered, "You'll never be happy until you're back at your research."

"I guess that's right," Nat agreed.

Little Dutch, who had been looking questioningly at him, burst out laughing. "Say, what's the idea? You've contradicted everything you've said, Nat?"

Nat Willis, who was tall, slight and dark, with a boyish expression, turned and grinned at Dutch. She noticed the grin did not reach his eyes. "I've had all the fighting I want," he explained, "so I agree with everybody. All I want is peace."

"You'll never get that living in the house with Bob," Dutch said.

Nat put his hand on Bob's shoulder. "Even old Bob can't strike any fire from me."

"Wait until we get you built—"

"Don't you start that," Nat interrupted gruffly and he gripped Bob's shoulder so hard he winced.

"Right you are!" Bob agreed and Dutch had the feeling that some understanding, from which she was excluded, existed between them.

Later, when Bob and Dutch were in their room Dutch said, "We must help Nat get back."

"Back where?" Bob turned and faced her.

Dutch stared, his voice was so harsh, and she said, "Why back to normal, of course."

"But there is no normal. That is gone," Bob's eyes were straight on her face. "Snap out of that idea," he said impatiently. "He's no sicker than the rest of the world. Everything has changed."

"Yes, I guess it has," Dutch agreed. She slipped on her blue satin pyjamas in which she looked like a little girl. She glanced around the room. "How do you like the twin beds?"

Bob tried to bring his eyes and mind to focus on the furniture. "They're very nice. What was the idea?"

Dutch looked thoughtful. "I couldn't get the kind of bed I liked. Besides, I had noticed when I was in New Mexico that you wakened every time I moved, so I thought when I could get the twin beds, maybe they would be better for you."

Bob reached for his towel. "Seems like you were always thinking about me, sweetheart."

"I guess I was, most of the time," she acknowledged.

"Keep up the good work." Bob laughed, as he went to the bathroom. When he returned, Dutch was kneeling beside her bed, her hands folded, her eyes closed, like a child, saying her prayers. Bob stopped suddenly and stared. He had forgotten that she did that. It was a long time since he had said a prayer. He suddenly felt like laughing or crying, he did not know which.

He stood looking at her until she got up. "Why

are you looking like that?" she asked wonderingly, as a child.

"I had forgotten you were religious."

"I'm not very religious," she said easily, "but when you were over there it helped me to pray. Didn't you ever want to pray when you were in danger?"

Bob walked to the mirror and began brushing his hair. "No," he said. "Some fellows said religion helped them, but I couldn't believe there was a God or he wouldn't let that kind of thing happen."

"I like to think there is," Dutch said lightly as she bounded into bed.

"I'll go and see if Nat is all right. I'll be back in a minute."

"Are you all right, old man?" Bob knocked at Nat's bedroom door.

"Sure! Come in!" Nat was in bed, the light out.

Bob stepped in, "Anything you need? Anything I can get you, old man?"

"Not a thing," Nat said. "You need to have slept in a foxhole to value clean sheets."

Bob sat down on the edge of the bed. A thin stream of light came in from the hall. "Sure do!" he agreed. "I have nightmares. I can't believe I'm really back."

"You have a swell wife, Bob."

"Yes," Bob agreed and that "yes" said volumes.

Then he added. "I'm going to need her more than ever."

Nat waited.

Bob went on. "My father, my mother, my friends, the newspapers, magazines, radio, all are throwing out blasts about the new world that is coming out of this war. But if anyone so much as nibbles at the edge of a new idea, they all draw back. Peoples' faces assume a strange set expression. You can hear their minds talking, 'We must be tolerant, but firm until these fellows get normal again.' They call everything different, abnormal."

"That's why I'm not going to fight anybody," Nat sat up, drew up his feet and put his arms around his knees. "It's useless, Bob. Folks will listen with great interest as long as we tell them what we saw and what we did. But let us even start to tell them something new we should do, and into their faces comes that set, hard, granite look. No! let them slide." He shoved down between the sheets. "I'm not going to save them again."

Bob stood up, "But we're in it, too. Do you know what Churchill said?"

"No! What about?"

"About the atomic bomb. He said, 'The bomb brought peace, but man alone can keep that peace.' He considers 'this a grim and ferocious epoch.' He says, 'there is not an hour to be wasted, there is not a day to be lost'."

"That man knows how to use words."

"Sure does," Bob agreed. He stood up. "I feel I must try to make the world see this is another appeasement mood it is sinking into."

"You're a crusader," Nat said. "I'm not."

Bob reached the door. There he stopped to say. "I don't believe I could be, if I hadn't Little Dutch. No matter what others may think—she'll be back of me."

"She fascinates me," Nat said. "She's so small, but so vital and radiant."

"Radiant!" Bob repeated. "Yes, I guess that's the word. Well, good-night!"

Bob found Dutch sitting up in bed reading. "What have you there?" he asked.

"Just a magazine to pass the time until you came back." She shut it as he tried to take it from her, still open.

"What were you reading?" he asked looking at the table of contents.

"Oh, just glancing through it," Dutch snuggled down in bed. "I believe I'm going to be lonesome."

Bob laughed. He tossed the magazine on the bedside table. He stood looking down at her. "We're going to have to be careful little girl," he said, "because I meant every word I said about the world needing to do something drastic."

"Something drastic?" Dutch sat up. "What do you mean exactly by something drastic, darling?"

"I mean the whole world should stop and think. We should stop producing things, we should stop having children until we know we have a decent future for them. Right now we are headed straight for suicide. People must be shocked into a realization of our danger."

"You think we'll have another war?"

"I know we will if we continue the way we are going. Nothing can prevent it and it will end civilization."

Dutch looked around. "You think we should never have children?"

Bob began to walk up and down. "We have never studied people darling. We don't know people. We know things and power. That is all our civilization has been interested in. Human life has been our cheapest commodity. Now power will be so cheap it will be worthless; things are useless because they are at the mercy of power. All we have left is people. I believe if we knew people, we'd discover a unifying principle that would save humanity."

"I don't understand all you're talking about," Dutch said clearly, "but are you sure you don't want a baby?"

"Nothing I'm surer of darling. I've been asked to speak to a number of agricultural societies this winter and I'm going—"

Dutch's eyes had grown very large and bright,

she was breathing fast. She interrupted, "You're too late, Bob. We're going to have a baby."

"A baby! We're going to have a baby! Oh, no! No, we can't have a—you must do something. I'll ask Nat. He'll know. I'll—"

"There! There darling!" Dutch swung her feet out of bed. "Don't get excited! I shouldn't have—"

Bob faced her. "Stop looking like that!" he said, "Skip it!" he shouted.

"Stop what?" Dutch stared at him.

"Forgive me, darling!" he said. He wiped perspiration from his forehead. "Just for a second I thought your expression was like the others."

## II

BOB HARROW had been showing Nat Willis over the farm. A feeling of pride in possession and ownership went through him as he led the way from the barn to the stables and then to the machine sheds. It surprised and rather disconcerted him, so that as he turned from closing the last shed door he said, "We humans are a queer mixture."

"Right!" Nat agreed and he drew in a deep breath of the air that was clear with a sparkle in it and just enough tang to make the blood quicken. "What prompted that profound remark?"

Bob grunted, "Here I am spreading myself about my possessions right after preaching that things are

no longer of any value, unless we can use them at the moment."

"Habits of thought are hard to change," Nat said.

They were walking through the woodyard. Bob asked, "Feel like sitting in the sun a bit, it's sheltered from the wind here?" He sat down on an upturned end of log and indicated the sawhorse for Nat.

"It's a great day," Nat said after a pause. "Looks like that storm cleared the air."

"Storms are supposed to do that," Bob mumbled. He was sitting, his hat pulled down to shade his eyes, leaning forward in the relaxed attitude of an animal dozing in the sun. "Why can't I feed and breed and dream my life away?"

"Maybe if you could answer that you'd know everything," Nat said dully.

"Nat, we've got to do something." Bob straightened up.

"Not me!" Nat yawned.

Bob sprang up, stamped across the chips that protested under his feet. He stopped in front of Nat. "There is a verse in the Bible that says 'For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.' We were given a lot, Nat."

"Not that we wanted it," Nat mumbled.

"Looks like that doesn't matter."

Nat did not reply. A bird—a drab little sparrow—came and settled on the top of the woodpile. It turned an enquiring eye on them. Bob's dog, Colonel,

came looking for him. With a great show of joy he licked Bob's hand, then turned around twice and lay down at his feet.

Bob fondled his head and sat down again. They were absorbing the sun in silence when there was the sound of approaching footsteps. They did not move. Presently Job's surprised face peered over the woodpile. Job was the hired man. His greatest distinction was his lack of distinction. Only a keen observer could have picked him out from thousands like him unless he noted his slightly surprised expression.

Bob was never very clear about how Job came to be their hired man. He stopped at the Harrow farm one evening when it was too late to go further and Mrs. Harrow had invited him to stay for the night. He had stayed ever since; his claim to farm life was based on his ability, as he said, to raise hogs.

Bob had nicknamed him Job, because of his many woes, and the name stuck. When Mr. Harrow had rented the farm, while Bob was overseas, Job went with it. When Bob got the farm back, Job was still there, but in some way he had acquired Sarah.

According to Sarah's own story, she was no ordinary hired girl. She hinted that there was a mystery connected with her birth. Some family of title and wealth was concerned with keeping her hidden away. She said she had managed to get into a mob scene in a moving picture once and she stood

out in such startling contrast to everyone else, her enemies bought out the company and destroyed the picture.

She was a startling figure. She was large, her features were irregular and coarse, but she had a magnificent head of platinum blonde hair, a satiny complexion and piercing black eyes. She never explained why she married Job, and he apparently had no ideas on the subject. They were now living in the old house on the Harrow farm.

Bob glanced up at Job and asked, "Want anything, Job?"

"That hog! Come and see!" Job said.

"Are you in trouble again?" Bob had given Job a hog to raise as his own.

Job nodded agreement with this summing up and repeated. "Come!"

"Want to go, Nat," Bob asked.

"Sure!" Nat agreed. He got up and he and Bob followed Job who led them toward a hog pen back of the barn.

"I thought you said you could feed hogs," Bob said.

"I can feed hogs," Job insisted with some pride, "but wherefore why?"

Nat looked at Bob and grinned. They followed Job who picked up two pails of bran mash that were so full they were slopping over. He led the way to

the pen where a small, skinny, black, hungry-looking hog was grunting and squealing impatiently.

Job put both pails of mash into the trough and the little beast devoured it without a pause, while the three men watched. Then Job reached down, picked up the little brute and dropped him into one of the pails. He didn't fill it.

Job looked questioningly from Bob to Nat and then back to Bob and asked mournfully, "Wherefore why?"

Bob burst into a peal of laughter and was soon joined by Nat. They bellowed in turn while Job stood looking after them, questioningly, as they strode back toward the house.

"How did the little beast do it?" Nat asked.

"You have education, you should know," Bob said.

Job came pattering after them demanding, "Wherefore, why feed that hog? It's always squealing for more, never gets any bigger."

"Does look a bit foolish," Bob acknowledged.

"You know what, Boss?" Job demanded.

Bob stopped. "No, what?"

"I'm going to look for that atom."

"What atom?"

"That atom you been talking about."

"But you can't see an atom, Job."

Job blinked. "Well, if I can't, Sarah can. She has wonderful eyes, that girl has."

"But no one can see an atom," Bob explained. "No one has ever seen one."

Job looked stubborn. "We have a magnifying glass," he said, "We'll maybe surprise you, like the fellow what learned why an apple falls down instead of up."

"You will surprise more than me, if you find an atom," Bob agreed.

"What'll you do with it if you find it?" Nat asked in his slow drawl. There was a twinkle in his eyes.

"I'll harness her up—set her off and Sarah and I will go places. We'll blow up them folks that's after Sarah—if we can find them."

"Not a bad idea," Nat agreed. "You might split up a baby atom and drop it on that hog."

"Boss says everything's going to be blowed up anyhow," Job said. He turned and started back toward the stable, mumbling, "I'm through feeding hogs, I am. I'm going after that atom. I never saw anything I couldn't split if I once got my hands on it."

Bob let his eyes scan the open prairie—a half section of wild unbroken land lay between him and Harrow, a tiny settlement beside the highway. The land was owned by a family in the east that had been holding it for years for a better price than they had ever been able to get. "I'm going over for the mail," he said. "Like to come?"

Nat looked toward the west. Something in his manner answered before he said, "My innards ain't hankerin' for exercise."

"I can take the car?"

"No thanks! Go ahead!"

Bob struck out toward the prairie. When he crossed the road allowance he half turned and called, "Tell Dutch I'll be back for lunch." Then, "No, don't bother. Maybe she wants something." He returned and went toward the house. He had to force himself to go. He had been avoiding a talk with Dutch. He was not quite ready for it yet. He had not slept all night. He had discovered in himself a strange yearning toward that unformed child. Little Dutch would feel it more strongly than he did, but she had not objected when he said they must not have this child. That was like her. She would try to understand his feelings. She might argue, feeling around in her mind for something to hold on to, but back of it all she believed in him.

It was this confidence she had in him that gave him the strength to do what he was going to do. He had no desire to be quixotic. He had no wish to do unusual things, but a tremendously unusual thing had happened, and it had to be faced, not dodged as most people were doing. He had learned that lesson in the hard way. The world must be made to face the fact that a new era had been born and our old furnishings and objectives were out-dated.

Bob had sat up in bed. There was no moon, but the stars were very bright. It recalled something that went through him like a dagger. Then he remembered. He seemed to be back there, lying flat among the bushes, just a little behind Buffer. He could hear the leaves rustling. That was the night Buffer died. Something inside of him tried to shrink away in pain, but instead it swelled out and out until he felt he would burst.

He threw his feet out of bed. He listened. Little Dutch was sleeping easily. He shoved his feet into his slippers. He put on his heavy dressing gown. He let himself out of the house without making any noise. He drew in a deep breath of the tangy night air. He looked at the stars and he reached his long right arm up—up. But the stars seemed much farther away than they had been. He tried to shake off his thoughts. He squared his shoulders and looked at the sleeping earth. He mumbled, "Let it be known farmers are refusing to seed the land and women are refusing to bear children and immediately millions will be voted to discover, What is Man? With all the resources we are using to discover things turned on man himself, who knows what we will find?" He stood very still. He seemed to hear the earth talking. He had heard it often like that, ever since he was a little fellow.

Suddenly he felt cold. He shivered. He felt strangely alone, and small. Who was he to be fussing

over problems like these? He was only a farmer. He hadn't a degree from any University, unless—. He put his hand on his breast where he sometimes wore his decorations—unless a degree in killing.

He began to stamp his feet and swing his arms. Then he began to run across the prairie to get warm. He ran in the direction of the little settlement of Harrow. His father had built a cottage there when he left the farm. But it was not his father's cottage he was thinking about. It was the house beside the church, where Mr. Emerson lived. His mother would think he was crazy if she knew he was running around in the middle of the night not properly dressed. But strangely enough he had a feeling that Mr. Emerson would understand. He had a need to talk to someone. He wouldn't waken him—but—he ran on.

There was a light in the back of the church. Bob remembered. Little Dutch had written him that the girls' guild had fitted up a classroom as a study for the minister and Bob tapped lightly on the window.

Rev. Emerson opened the door and out rushed a delicious odor of freshly made coffee.

"I saw your light," Bob explained awkwardly.

"Come in! I just made coffee and I wanted company to drink it." Mr. Emerson was hearty and he acted as if he had expected Bob.

When they drank their coffee and were sitting,

their feet pointed toward the little stove that gave out just enough heat, Bob was saying things he had not said, even to Dutch. He was saying, "I made a compact over there, I made it with myself, that if I came back, I'd see the investment those other chaps made wasn't lost. Now, the only way I can see of doing anything is to shock people into a realization that something tremendous has happened and we haven't much time to make hay."

Bob got up and went to the door. Rev. Emerson followed him. As they stood in the cool pure morning air, the first clear streaks of dawn shot up the eastern sky, Rev. Emerson leaned against the doorjam. "Did you hear of the fellow who thanked God for the blessed news of damnation?"

Bob laughed, "I didn't, but I don't believe you can scare people into heaven."

"I don't either," Mr. Emerson agreed.

Bob stood kicking a tuft of grass that had encroached on the walk. Finally he said, "Last night I was telling Little Dutch that I feel farmers should refuse to sow seed and raise stock; women should refuse to bear children—that would shock people into positive action to turn the world from the suicide toward which it is rushing."

Mr. Emerson did not speak. Bob raised his head and added, "Then Dutch told me we are going to have a child."

Still Mr. Emerson did not speak and Bob added,

"It is only an embryo yet and I think it would be a crime to let it develop into a human being. I can't bear the thought of bringing my son into what I see ahead." Still Mr. Emerson did not speak. Bob thought, "Now he'll give me a blast. Now I'll hear about the sacredness of life," but still Mr. Emerson did not speak.

Bob looked directly at him. "What do you think?"

Mr. Emerson's face and voice were undisturbed. "Little Dutch knows how you feel?"

"Yes, and thank God she's one person who considers me normal—doesn't want to change me, shut me out until I see as she does."

Mr. Emerson put his hand on Bob's shoulder. "Looks like this is her problem," he said placidly.

Bob considered a moment. "Thanks!" he said. He started for home but turned and came back to say, "When I used to listen to men who had done big things, giving their wives credit, I thought it was very nice, but didn't really mean much. I thought they were trying by nice words to compensate the wife who stood useless, in the shadow of their greatness. But I know now, they were trying to express something every married man feels—perhaps we chaps who were overseas more than others. There is more to a real marriage than mating to bear children." He glanced at the minister and was encouraged to go on.

"Over there, in the most hellish places, Dutch was with me. I could feel she was there. Sometimes I thought I heard her voice. Yes, sir, there were women in the army just as surely as there were men. We could feel them there. Now that we're back we need them. I need Dutch. Yes, sir! I don't need to tell you marriage is a marvelous thing. The strength of a man and a woman seem to flow together in the same stream. There is no other strength like it. If there was a leakage—" he looked squarely at the minister, "No, sir! I have to have Dutch a hundred percent with me."

He glanced toward the rising sun, "We are welcoming a new day. Thanks, sir, for listening to me." He turned toward home.

Mr. Emerson's voice followed him. "God bless you, Bob. God bless you and Little Dutch and a new world."

That was last night, and Dutch did not know he had been away. Dutch was up on a ladder in the living room putting up curtains. She acted as if nothing unusual had happened between them. Some protective instinct in Bob made him say, "Hadn't you better let me do that, Dutch?"

She looked down at him surprised, "You never put up a curtain in your life, did you, dear?"

Bob grinned. "I don't know as I did, which isn't saying I can't."

"I can manage all right. I had these up but I

didn't like the way they hung. These three are all right, but this one," she began taking down the one she had just put up. "I'll have to hem it again. It's not quite straight."

"I'm going down to the post office. Do you want anything?"

She went on using her hands, but her brow knit. "No, I don't think so, unless Mr. Davis has some ripe bananas. You might bring me half a dozen."

"O.K.!" Bob was watching her. He was wondering why it was that just to be near her, to be talking to her made him feel so much better, so much more complete.

Dutch had reached the floor, the curtain over her arm. She looked up at him, "Did you want anything, dear?"

"Yes!" he put his hands on her shoulders. "I want a kiss."

Her arms, curtain and all went around him.

His arms drew her close and holding her like that he said, "Dutch, I was a bit rough last night, but I didn't mean to be."

"That's all right," her voice was soothing. "I shouldn't have blurted it out like that, I didn't know—didn't understand."

Bob released her so that he could see her face. "Do you think you understand now, how I feel?"

Dutch's very large eyes met his squarely. "No,

I guess I don't, dear, but you'll get used to the idea. A baby brings healing and love with it, they say."

"It isn't myself I'm thinking about, dear, it's the baby. It would not be fair to bring a child into a world like this. Dutch, I would feel guilty if I did. Besides we must—"

Dutch was patting his arm. "Yes! Yes!" she agreed. "It's hard to understand things. We'll talk about it later."

A clock on the mantel that they had received for a wedding present, began to chime. She glanced at it. "If you're going to the post office, dear, you'd better go or you won't be home in time for dinner."

Bob looked at her. He shook his head. "All right," he said. He hurried out. She hadn't grasped at all what he meant, or if she had she was dodging. He had a feeling that she would be horrified if she did. Yet he had told her plainly enough that women should refuse to bear children to face what they would have to face in the world of tomorrow. He had tried to make her see, that people—ordinary average people—must do something drastic to bring the world to its senses.

He stumbled a little as he started across the wild unbroken land. He was so filled with a feeling of frustration, the trackless prairie suited his mood better than going by the road. His mind was not following any train of thought. It seemed to be full

of raspy edges, churning around, without control or direction.

"I guess I'm difficult," he thought after he had covered half the distance and he slowed down. "I'd better stop thinking for awhile. From what you read, the average man is delighted when he hears he is going to be a father, instead of being horrified." He stopped and looked around him. His face set. "They should be horrified to bring a boy into the world to fight in the next war," he said aloud. "They should be!"

Here he was, at it again. It seemed he couldn't get away from what that bomb had done to him. He looked at the prairie. He liked the wild prairie. It had something it lost when once broken. He wondered idly what it was. It wasn't exactly beauty, it was something gained from ages of struggle with wind and weather, it stirred him deeply. He had seen men with the same expression in their faces as the land had. They didn't know fear. Those fellows were tough, but they were free. They were the freest men he had ever known. He had met some of them overseas.

He glanced around. Something red on a bush attracted his attention. He went to see what it was. Rose haws. They were pretty. Prettier at a distance than close up. Dutch had some lovely roses in the garden. Great, perfect, voluptuous, beauties! She had one in the house yet. He seemed to smell the

heavy perfume and he felt a sudden nostalgia for the wild rose.

Those wild roses did not last long, and the perfume was delicate with an elusive quality that stirred memories and dreams. They never sought shelter, those wild roses, but took their stand right out on the open prairie. They never asked quarter from man, beast or plant. They were small, but hardy, with a delicacy in their structure that no cultivation had improved on and in their outflung branches there was a challenge to wind and sun and rain, something so wild and free that it stirred Bob strangely. Or perhaps it was memories from when he went to school over this same wild prairie. He had taken Miss Staples, the one teacher he remembered, the first rosebuds he found. Often they were wilted from his hot little hands, but never had she failed to make him feel they were wonderful.

He had met Miss Staples in London. She was teaching and firewatching. What an evening that had been! When he went to school he thought of her as old, but over there she seemed younger than he was. They went to dinner together. Not much of a dinner, but how they did talk. All about Harrow. It was grand. He'd never forget it. She mentioned the wild roses he used to take to her. He never seemed closer to anyone mentally, except Dutch, than he seemed to Miss Staples that night. When they parted she said, "God bless you, Bob."

Bob had said, "If I believed there was a god to take any interest in this show, I'd ask him to bless you."

Miss Staples had laughed a little, "I'm able to think that He's on the job and He has his eye on you, whether you ask him or not."

Bob remembered that he said, "Thank you!" It was the next day he heard about the bomb. It fell on her school. Miss Staples was found spread over six little bodies. Four of the children had been saved by her, but she and the other two—. Bob had blurted right out when he heard. He was young in the war then. He was too tough for that now, but he did clear his throat.

He had heard a squeaking in the grass as he stood looking at the rose haws. He followed the sound to some late wild asters beside a stream, they called it "just the stream." It didn't amount to enough to give it a name. He stood looking for some time before he discovered a snake. It had a bird in its mouth that it had half swallowed. The bird was calling for help. Bob looked around and soon found a stick. He hit the snake that quickly disgorged the bird and tried to get away. Bob, however, held it under his foot. He stood looking at the repulsive creature.

"I suppose you were only acting according to your light," he said. "You had it all planned to crawl into your hole and spend the winter digesting

that bird. You have all the instincts of a capitalist, but no doubt the bird is digesting a worm by this time." He removed his foot and watched the snake curve away. He walked on.

"Hello, Bob, it's good to see you around again," Mr. Davis had come out to carry in a box of oranges that had been left by Frank, the bus driver. "Frank was a bit late or he'd have carried this in."

"Frank still on this route?" Bob asked. It didn't seem possible that in the ages he had been away, not even the bus driver had changed.

"Yep!" Mr. Davis was grunting a bit. "Don't know as we could get along without Frank. Since I got that attack of lumbago he's been right good about carrying the heavy boxes inside for me."

Bob had stepped inside. He glanced toward the post office. "That isn't Essie, is it?"

"Who else?" Mr. Davis asked as he eased the box down with Bob's assistance. "You know her husband, Ben Halton's missing?"

"I didn't know," Bob said. He walked toward the post office at the back of the store. "Hello, Essie! It's good to see you again."

"Same to you, Bob," Essie opened the door into her compartment and held out her hand. "Home for good?"

"Just for awhile," Bob said. He realized that

the old self-consciousness between him and Essie was there after all these years. She was feeling it, too.

It had been between them ever since the summer Bob's mother hired Essie Davis to help her through the harvest. It was not because Essie was good at housework that Mrs. Harrow had engaged her, it was because she couldn't get anyone better. Essie was supposed to be better than no one. She could milk, turn the cream separator, prepare the vegetables, and wash the dishes, if Mrs. Harrow watched her closely enough.

Everyone in the neighborhood knew Mrs. Davis was no housekeeper and Essie was worse. Besides, Essie had been talked about, but Mrs. Harrow never gave that a thought. To her it would have seemed, if she had thought about it, that Bob was so far above Essie Davis that their two worlds, no matter how close, would never touch. Then one evening in the moonlight she saw Bob standing with his arm around Essie. Of course she blamed Essie.

Mrs. Harrow had fired Essie on the spot and on the spot, Essie had tossed back her untidy mop of red hair and said right out, "I'll let you know where to meet me, Bob."

And Bob, who had never thought of meeting her replied, "I'll be there."

It was Bob's worst quarrel with his mother. He sometimes thought he had never felt quite the same to his mother since. She had merely pointed out the

kind of girl Essie Davis was. Bob was not even sure his mother had been unfair, but the more his mother said against Essie, the more some stubborn streak in him made him defend her, and the more he defended her the more he believed his defense.

He didn't see Essie again for years. She had gone to Minneapolis to work in a factory. There she married Ben Halton. It was a pretty good match for her. She was home for holidays once and she told Bob she had written to him after she left his home, and she had named a meeting place. She had gone and waited for hours. Bob explained that he never received the letter.

"Your mother must have burned my letter," Essie said.

Bob winced a little. A lady would not have said that. Perhaps his mother had been right in trying to part them. Perhaps if she had not interfered, he would soon have realized that his feeling had merely been bred of the moonlight and youth. Instead, there was a strange self-consciousness that persisted and prevented indifference.

They talked for awhile about this one and that one. Essie handed him some literature from Minnesota University that came in the mail. It was about the course he had planned to take. As he prepared to leave he asked, "Have you any children?" He knew she came home to nurse her mother, who had died recently, after terrible suffering. He knew

that her love for her mother was one of her strongest passions, and he did not wish to mention it. So he asked if she had children.

Essie threw back her head. In her green eyes was a strange expression as she said. "This is no world to bring children into. I'm not going to have any until I'm sure I won't have to send them to the slaughter house."

Again Bob winced. She was expressing his own thoughts but with Dutch in his mind he felt himself shiver. He wanted to get out in the air. He forgot to ask about the bananas. Essie's voice followed him to the door, "Going to Minneapolis?"

"Yes, to take a course at the University."

"I'm going down soon."

"That so!" Bob smiled, then with a careless "I'll be seeing you," he walked away. He didn't know what he meant. He guessed he didn't mean anything. He said it because he had always felt he had not given Essie quite a square deal. Not that he expected to turn back the pages of time. What was done, was done.

Bob strolled along the gravelled walk thinking about the people who influence our lives. There was Essie now. There was mild excitement in the thought of her, but it was not altogether pleasant. Then there was the minister. Bob was going slightly out of his way so that he would pass Mr. Emerson's house. He had met the man only twice, but the

thought of him gave Bob a warm satisfied feeling such as one gets from only a few people in a lifetime. Take last night for instance, neither of them had thought it necessary to explain why he was up in the middle of the night.

Mr. Emerson was raking the leaves. He saw Bob almost as soon as Bob saw him and came toward the gate, the rake in his hand. "Good morning!" he called in a rich, full, cheerful voice. "Glorious morning, isn't it?"

"Sure is!" Bob agreed and he slowed down. "Quite a pile of leaves you got?"

"Yes," Mr. Emerson shoved back his hat and looked at what he had. "There were a lot of leaves this year. Have you ever noticed that sometimes there are so many more than others?"

"I don't know as I thought of it that way," Bob confessed, "but I remember when I was quite young telling my father the shade was better than usual that year."

Mr. Emerson looked sharply at him. "I don't know as I ever thought of it that way," he said, "but it amounts to the same thing, I guess. I don't know as I ever did," he repeated. He looked at Bob, "You have to live to be pretty old not to find new thoughts lying around waiting for you, or new twists to old thoughts. That's what I like. Come in?"

"No, thanks," Bob shook his head. "Dinner will be ready by the time I get home. I came to get the

mail. I wrote to Minnesota University for particulars about a psychology course I'm planning to take there this winter." He held up a large envelope.

"Your father was saying you are planning to finish your course. A good idea if you can manage it, but if I'd been staying here I'm afraid I'd have been selfish enough to try to put a few obstacles in your path."

Bob smiled. "Why, how's that?"

Mr. Emerson grinned boyishly. "Purely selfish. I'd like to have you and Dutch here. But as I'm going away, I'll agree it's a wise thing for you to do."

"Why are you going?" Bob asked.

Mr. Emerson felt in the pocket of his smock. "I just had a letter from Brother Hawkins. He's coming back."

"Oh!" Bob said. He had met Brother Hawkins a couple of times. He had nothing against him but he had nothing for him. He was one of those men who pass by unnoticed. "Where are you going, Mr. Emerson?"

Mr. Emerson took off his hat, put his feet down firmly like a man prepared to meet the impact of some staggering fact. "That's the problem? We preachers move around, we don't get our roots down, any place. We don't get homes. Mother and I have to decide where we'll spend our remaining years. Likely as not we'll have to take whatever we can get, as houses are scarce."

Bob looked at him. "You've been happy here?"

"Never was happier any place," he said heartily. "We sure seemed to fit in like the place had been made for us, but that's all right, Bob, it's Mr. Hawkins' place. It has served us well."

"How is that?" Bob asked.

Mr. Emerson leaned the rake against a tree. He walked to the gate and resting his hands on the top bar he bent confidently toward Bob. "I had just been retired when the war broke out. I hadn't minded much," he hesitated a little, "until then. But with the war going on neither mother nor I wanted to be out of things. This is how it was," he peered up into Bob's face. "The whole world was being swept along like a mighty flood and we were tossed up on the bank, bits of wreckage, left there to rot. And that wouldn't have been so bad only we were eating food and wearing clothes and occupying space and seeing things we could do that needed doing." His voice had risen.

He laughed a little. "Well, I kept worrying them fellows but they couldn't seem to find anything for me to do, but keep files and such like, and I'm no good for that. But I kept on and finally they sent me here," he chuckled. "To get rid of me, I guess." He straightened up. "I've been here five years, Bob, and it's been the best five years of my life and it has been the best for mother. We thank God every morning in our prayers for it."

"Harrow has reason to thank God, too," Bob said, "and many do."

Mr. Emerson smiled and stepped back. "I didn't intend to give a lecture," he said, "but you do something to me, Bob Harrow. This is only the third time I've met you and I've opened up the secret places."

Bob felt a stinging back of his eyes. He winked fast as he asked, "Would you like to settle in Harrow, Mr. Emerson?"

"Nowhere we'd like better. Mother and I spoke of it; but there is no vacant house, but don't give it a thought. We'll get something."

Bob put out his hand. "Don't worry," he said, "we'll think about it." Bob was never to forget that handshake. He felt a current running through him, a physical proof of a spiritual welding that he knew had taken place between him and the older man. "Strange thing, that," he thought as he went back across the wild prairie. "I didn't want to get mixed up with a preacher."

Nat went to Milltown right after supper. He had received word that a Dr. Wilton, who had attended him when he was in the hospital, was going through and he wished to check up on him.

Bob went out to see that the chores were done. Job, the hired man, generally managed to do the routine work, but if anything out of the ordinary

happened, he was no use. Neither was Sarah. That was Bob's reason for asking Nat to stay and keep an eye on things for the winter. Nat would have no manual work, but he was needed.

Dutch, wearing a long blue satin housecoat, liberally splashed with flowers, sat in the living room in front of a sparkling grate fire, hemming the red velvet curtain that spread around her in a great sweep. It made her look like a queen on a throne.

Bob stopped in the doorway. "You look like a dresden doll in the middle of a bouquet of flowers."

Dutch looked up with knit brows. "Well, I don't feel like a dresden doll or anything else picturesque or poetic. There's something the matter with this curtain."

Bob went into the bedroom and took off his smock and boots. He put on a rich brown smoking jacket and a pair of slippers that Dutch had given him for his birthday. Again he stopped in the doorway before entering the living room. It was a pretty picture. It was the kind of picture he had visioned for four years while he slugged around in mud and dirt and blood and pain and hate, only he hadn't believed it could be so lovely.

This house Dutch had built for them, he had helped plan it of course, but it had dozens of little touches that made it both convenient and lovely. Dutch certainly had a gift as a homemaker. Why couldn't he let well enough alone. Why couldn't he

let her raise a family and live like other people, as long as folks were allowed to live in peace. Again he went over the routine. His grandfather had raised his father on this farm and sent him off with his blessing. His father had raised him on this farm and sent him off with his blessing.

"No," he brought his foot down with a bang, again he said, "I'll be damned if I will."

Dutch jumped and dropped her sewing in her lap. "Whatever is the matter, Bob?"

Bob walked over to the hearth. He gripped the edge of the mantel and faced her. "We must have a serious talk, Dutch, right away. I don't think you realize how I feel about things."

"All right, dear," Dutch spoke easily, naturally, almost casually, but Bob noticed that her hands closed on the curtain.

He glanced at the fire. Now that he was face to face with this situation, he did not know how to begin. He wet his lips and cleared his throat. He shuffled from one foot to the other. Then he turned his back to the fire, planted his feet firmly on the hearth, crossed his arms on his chest and said, "Dutch, I think we should not have a child." He saw her lips part as she drew in a quick breath and he said, "Don't try to answer me until I explain."

He went to the window and stood for some time, looking out into the darkness. Dutch did not speak or move. He returned to his former place on the

hearth. "It isn't that I don't want responsibility, dear. It isn't that I don't like children. I think it's because I like them too much. Over there, I saw—" he stopped. "No use in going over that. I know mother thinks I'm not quite normal. She thinks that atomic bomb got me. Maybe it did. Rather I know it did. It got me the way I think it should get everybody. Dutch, it's so tremendous, it must change our way of thinking, of living.

"When you bring a child into this world you are living for the future. As I see things, Dutch, the future has nothing to live for. Another war is on the way, more horrible than anything ever known. Men will destroy the very earth we live on. What they don't destroy they will leave so vile, no one can breathe the poisonous air. Civilizations have risen and fallen; nations have come and gone. This time, the very earth itself will go."

"Can't anything be done?" Dutch's eyes were very large and anxious.

"Not as long as people keep thinking the way they are thinking. Not as long as possessions and power is the goal of the human race."

"I guess religion is the only thing that will help."

"Religion has caused lots of wars. I never heard of it stopping one," Bob said flatly.

Dutch's voice was slightly ruffled, "Mr. Emerson says God is our only hope."

"Then we had better give up fooling ourselves and live for the day. Eat, drink and be merry."

Dutch picked up her sewing. "Maybe it would be as well not to think so much about it, dear."

Bob clenched his fists. "We've got to think about it. It changes everything. Get this clear. That bomb means we have the power to destroy the very earth we live on and by. It can't be kept secret, and every scientist admits there is no answer to it. I don't seem able to make people feel how tremendous, how revolutionary it is. Germany knew the power there was locked up. She said it would destroy, not only her enemies but their homes. We got it first, but she was only a lap behind. Russia knows, so does—" he threw out his hands in a dismissing gesture.

Dutch, who had begun to sew, raised the curtain in her lap. "I remember those threats Germany made. Most people thought it was just wild raving, but—"

"They know now it wasn't, and the allied governments knew all the time it wasn't," Bob interrupted. "Dutch, I'm as sure as I am that I'm standing here, that another war is on the way, and sooner this time. It's inevitable and no one who knows that as I do, has a right to bring a child into the world, to fight or to be blown to pieces at home."

Dutch reached for a ruler to measure the hem on the curtain, and with the needle between her lips

she said a little thickly, "There's always a chance something else may happen. The scientists are working all—"

Bob caught his under lip between his teeth. He held himself or he would have knocked the curtain out of her hands. Were all women like that? With the very earth being blown up under her feet, she stopped to measure a curtain down to the tenth of an inch. No wonder you could not change the world. He turned toward the fire and his glance swept the mirror above the mantel. Just for a second he saw Dutch's fists close on the curtain and her body stiffen, as her eyes, strained and anxious, followed him. Then, as he whirled back, she took up her work and bent easily over it.

He stood very still, until he felt he had control of himself. Then he said stiffly. "Dutch, we must be perfectly honest with each other. I must know just how you feel. This is too serious for half-way measures."

Dutch tossed the curtain aside. She stood up; she met his eyes squarely. For a minute or two Bob thought they were going to really discuss their problem, then she said, "We're going to do as you planned, dear. We don't need to change anything. You can take your course in Minneapolis, and I'll take up music. I've wanted to for a long time. We'll see the sights, too. I've wanted the bright lights, plays, night clubs. We'll—"

"Excuse me!" Bob said and he dashed out. She hadn't listened to his argument. She hadn't really thought about it. It wasn't like Dutch to dodge things. He walked out to the road. A terrible feeling of frustration swept over him, he looked up at the stars. He had looked up at them over there and dreamed of being at home. He laughed strangely.

He heard a car coming. He waited. It was Nat. "Did you see Doc Wilton?" Bob asked as he stepped unto the fender to ride down the lane.

"No. He's coming through tomorrow. He'll have a couple of hours. I'm going to take him across to the other line, if you can spare the car."

"Sure thing," Bob said. "What time's he coming? Could we give him dinner?"

They had reached the house. Nat considered. "He reaches Milltown at five. I have to get him to Standhope by seven-thirty."

"Splendid!" Bob said.

"What's splendid?" Dutch was in the doorway. Bob explained.

"We'll have those prairie chickens you shot, Nat," Dutch said eagerly as they entered the house together. "I wanted an occasion to have them. I thought of having Mr. and Mrs. Emerson but maybe you can get some wild ducks later on, before we go."

"Emerson was telling me that they have to get out. Hawkins is coming back," Bob said.

"Oh, I am so sorry," Dutch dusted her hands

after throwing a stick unto the grate fire. "Where are they going?"

"They don't know." Bob drew up a big chair. "Sit here, Nat. Would you like a cup of cocoa?"

"Well—I—let me make it."

"I'm a specialist, at cocoa," Bob was glad to escape to the kitchen. "Will you have some, Dutch?"

"Yes, thanks!" she followed him to the kitchen door. "Have they no idea where they are going?"

"No, they haven't. They'd like to stay here if there was any place."

Dutch walked to the hearth and back. "Bob, what would be the matter with letting them live here for the winter? You wouldn't mind, would you, Nat?"

Nat, who was lying stretched out, completely relaxed before the fire said, "I didn't hear what you said, Dutch, but I wouldn't mind."

Dutch laughed. She went back to the kitchen. "I just can't bear to think of Mr. and Mrs. Emerson, who have done so much for us all during the war, not having a comfortable place to spend the winter."

Bob looked at her, "You said you didn't want anyone to live in your new house, use your things, when the rental agent in Milltown was asking about places."

"Yes, I know," Dutch's brow was knit. "But I don't feel that way about Mr. and Mrs. Emerson. I'd feel—I'd feel—" her eyes began to glow. "Bob, I'd

feel this house was being honored. I'd feel my things were being honored by having them used by Mr. and Mrs. Emerson."

"Whew!" Bob whistled. "There's hero worship for you. How'd it be if I go down and bring them up and talk it over with them?"

"Bob, would you? Nat, you're sure you wouldn't mind?" Dutch skipped from one room to the other. "I'll add some more milk and cocoa for us all. Nat, you're a good hand at making toast, and I've enough date cookies."

"We've a long-handled fork you can use over the grate fire," Bob explained. He went to the telephone. Dutch was folding up the curtain. "They haven't gone to bed," Bob said. "I'll have them here in a jiffy." He put on his coat over his smoking jacket and hurried out.

There are times that stand out in memory for no particular reason. That evening was one of them. Mr. and Mrs. Emerson were as delighted as children at the prospect of spending the winter in Bob's and Dutch's home. "We were a bit worried," Mrs. Emerson confessed when it was all settled. "Joseph had promised to give a course of lectures for the Farmers' Co-operative Movement if he were here, and I was going to take a class in First Aid. Then, while nurses are so scarce, I can help when needed as I have been doing."

"We can do all that now," Mr. Emerson added,

"and live like Riley while we're doing it." He laughed and shook all over as he added, "I'm not a bit heroic, Bob, I like a warm house and good meals."

"Don't believe him," Mrs. Emerson warned. "If he's interested in anything he forgets whether he's had his meals. As for being cold, he doesn't know half the time whether it's cold or hot."

So they laughed and bantered and drank cocoa and ate toast and cookies. Nobody said anything bright or very clever, but there was a nice warm feeling, rich in physical and mental satisfaction, that flowed through them and through the house and welded them into a kind of whole in which they seemed to be more complete than they could remember to have felt before.

While Bob took Mr. and Mrs. Emerson home, Dutch and Nat lay back relaxed in comfortable chairs in front of the glowing coals in the grate. After a long pause she said, "Nat, tell me about that fellow you and Bob called 'Buffer'."

"There isn't much to tell. He was just an ordinary chap."

"I know, but tell me. He and Bob were pals?"

"Not special, so far as I know."

"Bob has talked a lot about him."

"We all have."

"Why?" Dutch leaned forward. "Why, Nat?"

After a minute Nat began to talk. "It was night and we were lying among some bushes, Buffer well

forward, when we discovered we were trapped. We were covered by a machine gun nest. There was no moon, but the stars were very bright. I remember, they seemed so low we could pick them out of the sky."

"Yes."

"Those fellows knew we were there. They were watching for the slightest movement. Now and again they fired. No one spoke, then Buffer began to inch forward. They began to fire at him. Finally, they hit him; we heard him grunt, but he went on. They turned their whole attention to him. They got him again, but he went on. He got them finally and we're here."

A twig in the grate flared up brightly and then was gone and only the glow remained.

"You buried him?" Dutch asked like a child who has heard a story once and wants it again, with nothing left out.

"Yes, we buried him, Bob and I. I'm not religious, but I said a prayer, right down on my knees."

"And Bob?" her voice insisted.

"He was standing, his full six feet three, his arm high above his head. I asked him what he was doing. He said he'd caught a star right out of the sky. He said Buffer tossed it back to him as he went through. It did look like he had something bright in his hand."

Dutch drew in a deep breath. There was a long pause before she asked, "Nat, has Bob caught too many stars out of the sky to be able to live like other folks?"

Nat leaned forward, his gaze on the coals, his hands hanging idly between his knees. "I don't know, Dutch."

Her hand fluttered like a white bird in an invisible cage. "What am I to do, Nat? What am I to do?"

There was a step at the door. Bob had returned.

Nat went to bed. Bob stood on the hearth looking at Dutch. Idly he reached down and picked up a skein of bright wool, out of her work basket. It resisted and then came dragging a bundle of clippings. "What have we here?" he asked.

Dutch looked and snatched them out of his hand. "Oh, just patterns and recipes and things," she tossed them into the fire. "I've finished with them."

Bob could not hide his surprise as he looked from her to the papers that were beginning to smoke. "Looks like you were trying to hide something, sweetheart. Not love letters, are they?" he asked lightly.

Dutch laughed. "I have no love letters but yours, and I wouldn't burn them for a million dollars."

Bob mumbled, "Ah!"

The papers in the grate had begun to burn and from the red glow underneath, a sentence stood out sharp and clear. "Never let a returned man know you consider he is not normal."

Bob read it. Then he looked at Dutch. She was staring at it, an expression almost of horror on her face. She turned and her eyes met his.

They stared at each other until the papers flared up, turned gray, then almost white, and flew up the chimney. Bob said, "So you are like the rest! I am a returned man who must be fenced out until I see things as you do." He laughed a bit wildly and began walking up and down the room. "I offered my life for my country, that was fine. That was patriotic."

"I faced death over and over. That made me a hero. I got decorations for that." He tapped his breast. "I was wounded and I bore it without bitterness, although I knew I would never be quite as strong again, that was brave.

"I flew over the earth, I hunted men and was hunted by them. I killed men. I saw men killed, I saw men suffer and die, I heard them talk. I knew their thoughts. Then I came back and helped blow a great chunk of the very earth I love into nothing, and you expect me to think the thoughts I thought before I went away." His voice had risen. "My God, what would be the use of living if I could do that."

"Shish! dear! shish! Don't get excited," Dutch begged and tried to reach him.

But Bob backed away from her. "There, you have it," he shouted. "You've the same expression as the rest. You've the same set, resigned, determined expression as the others." He mimicked, "Just humor him along until he gets normal again. Fence him out until he thinks the way we want him to think."

Then his voice changed. His whole body stiffened. His passion tensed the air in the whole room, "I am what I am. Not what I was yesterday, not what I will be tomorrow. I am what I am today and you and my country will damned well have to take me as I am."

### III

BOB had never before realized how a man and a woman can live in the same house, carry on the usual amenities of life and yet be separated by something more implacable than walls, more separating than distance. Like all married people, he and Dutch had had small differences, that hurt or annoyed at the time, but they were soon forgiven and forgotten. But this was different. This was something that threatened the very flowing of their lives together and neither seemed able to do anything about it.

Bob was puttering around the yard, fixing this and that. He wanted to keep out of the house. For the first time since he had met Dutch, when they

were going to school together, he wished to keep away from her. He was glad when his father and mother drove up in their old rattletrap of a car. He greeted them more loudly and warmly than usual, because there was but little feeling back of his words.

His mother's voice was hushed as she asked, "Your friend, Nat, is a doctor, isn't he?"

"Almost!" Bob said cheerily. "You don't need a doctor do you? You look the picture of health."

"No!" Mrs. Harrow agreed, "but Mary Simpson does. We've just been over there and she's terribly sick and they can't get a doctor."

Dutch had come out and asked, "Mary Simpson? What do you think is the matter?"

"It might be her appendix," Mrs. Harrow said. "Whatever it is, she can't bear to be moved. I promised to take Mrs. Emerson and Nat over at once."

"Nat, you're wanted," Bob shouted.

Nat was clearing up the garden. He moved in a friendly way and went on gathering up the debris.

"Nat, we want you," Dutch called.

Bob noticed how clear and penetrating her voice was, like the voice of a child.

Nat at once stuck his fork into the soft earth and strolled toward them.

"I'm sure Nat would know what to do," Dutch said.

"Would he do it?" Robert Harrow rumbled.

"Indeed he would if he could." Dutch appeared to resent any question regarding his helpfulness. "He is one of the cleverest and kindest of men. Isn't he, Bob?"

Bob did not answer.

"Good morning!" Nat greeted Mr. and Mrs. Harrow. "Did you wish to see me?"

"Yes," Mrs. Harrow said eagerly and she described Mrs. Simpson's condition, ending with, "They can't get a doctor and she can't bear to be moved and she's one of the finest women."

Nat bent down to pat the dog Colonel, as Mrs. Harrow talked. In fact his whole manner and the atmosphere he created was not encouraging. When she finished he did not speak. There was a troubled silence. Then she added, "We thought you'd maybe come and do what you can for her? We'll take you out as soon as we pick up Mrs. Emerson."

"I'm sorry. I can't do anything," Nat said. "Come, Colonel," he spoke to the dog. Then to Mrs. Harrow, "I hope your friend will get better."

"But—but—you know something about medicine," Dutch stammered.

Nat laughed gruffly. "So little they wouldn't give me a degree to practice." He whistled to Colonel, said "Good-morning!" to Mr. and Mrs. Harrow and strolled back to the garden.

"He might have come and tried," Mrs. Harrow said hotly. "He has a right—"

"He has no right to practice," Bob defended.

"And I was depending so much on him," Mrs. Harrow was almost in tears. "He's downright wicked."

"Oh, no, he's not!" Bob was surprised at Dutch's vehemence. "He's one of the most tender hearted men."

"Tender hearted!" Bob laughed. "Do you know how tender hearted he is?"

Mr. Harrow, who was puffing hard on his pipe said, "He's one of the fellows who doesn't let his heart interfere with his common sense."

"You're right, Dad," Bob agreed. But it was at Dutch he looked as he went on. "Nat is so tender hearted, that when one of his men reported he had captured a sniper who had shot fifteen of his men, he said at once 'Shoot him.'"

"But, it's a woman," the man reporting said.

"Just the same," Nat replied. "Shoot her!"

A strange atmosphere, right out of Europe and the battlefield, seemed to fill that farmyard. Bob was wondering why he had told that incident to Dutch.

"He was right!" Robert Harrow said.

"He has a right to try to save Mary Simpson," Mrs. Harrow was crying. "I'll never like him."

Dutch turned to Bob, "What did you say Churchill called this age, Bob?"

"He called it a 'grim and ferocious epoch'."

Something in Dutch's voice caused all eyes to turn to her. Apparently unconscious of them she said. "Grim and ferocious. No place for sentimentality. No place for sentiment even. Nothing but hard fact!" she started back toward the house muttering, "But what are facts? What are facts?"

Later, when they were having lunch, Nat said to Bob, "I guess your mother thought it was pretty tough I wouldn't go to see her friend. But if I'd gone to her, I'd have had to go to others. I'd soon be in trouble with the medical authorities as well as worn out by a country practice."

"Sure thing!" Bob agreed decidedly. "You couldn't do that."

Dutch shuffled uncomfortably.

Nat looked at her. "You don't agree, Dutch?"

"What about the individual?" Dutch asked. "Doesn't the individual count?"

"In a grim and ferocious epoch?" Nat asked.

"But the individual is back of it all," Dutch said firmly. "I can't see clearly. I can't. There's a mist! A fog! A wall! I can't see."

Bob went about fixing up the farm for the winter with a feeling of uncertainty. Dutch, the one sure dependable, unchanging factor in his life was slipping away. He had a lost feeling and yet he seemed unable to fight against the current that was carrying him down a rushing stream that was

quickenings as it reached its goal, wherever that might be.

He had not tried to talk to Dutch. He had not wished to. She evidently felt the same toward him. She was able to carry off the ordinary routine better than he could. At mealtime, when Nat was there, she would retail bits of gossip for his benefit. Essie Davis was telling that she and Bob were going to Minneapolis for the winter. Dutch told Nat that Essie Davis was the only girl she had ever been jealous of. Mrs. Emerson was packing the things she would not need for the winter on the farm. Sarah, Job's wife, said her grandfather used to grind glass for telescopes. She had the machine he used and she was going to grind some glass from which Job was going to make a telescope that no atom could dodge.

But when Bob and Dutch were alone, they had nothing to say to each other. It was as if some strange, poisonous gas filled the air—a devilish concoction that held them apart with hands of steel—while something else lured them with all the dreams and visions God and the angels have given man.

Bob was putting on the last storm window when he noticed a car turn in at the gate. He called to Nat who was carrying the fly screens down cellar. "Tell Dutch she's going to have visitors."

Dutch, whose ears were keenly attuned to Bob's voice, came running. "Who is it?"

Bob did not answer. He did not know. It was

disturbing to have Dutch so close. He wanted her and he didn't want her. He didn't know what he wanted, and he blamed her for his dissatisfaction.

"It's Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins," Dutch said. "He's still in uniform. Did you know, he's a Captain?"

"No!" Bob grunted. He realized he was being loutish but he seemed unable to be anything else. And, because he was ashamed of himself, he was rougher than he wished to be. "What are they coming here for?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," Dutch was watching them through the window, but keeping out of sight.

"Did you invite them?"

"No!" Dutch prepared to go to the door. "I wish I had the curtains up. Mrs. Hawkins is such a critic."

"Let her criticise," Bob advised.

Dutch sparkled up at him. Just to agree for a second, on that one miserable point seemed to make a bridge between them; but it was not strong enough to carry them over.

Bob said, "Don't ask me to entertain them."

"You'll have to talk to them while I get them a drink of black currant wine," Dutch said, "and be sure to call him Captain. Mrs. Hawkins insists on that."

Captain Hawkins was a squarish man. His head was almost square. His face was square. His body

was square and when he stood up, he was a surprise, he was so close to the ground. His legs seemed square. He had cultivated the grand manner. He was a persistent back-slapper and he never seemed to get the right force into it. It was said he once knocked a man over.

His voice was thin and consistently resisted the heartiness he tried to put into it. His vocabulary was limited, and when he found a new word he worried it to death on the spot. His laugh started out to be a coarse but hearty guffaw, but he invariably caught it and gentled it down to an emasculated simper that brought a wry twist to the lips of most men in his congregation. His sermons were from text books that he had studied, when taking theology at college. He had a hundred and fifty, which lasted him for three years, allowing for holidays and the times a visitor happened along to take the sermon. He was never allowed to stay more than three years in one place. He explained that he was needed in another vineyard.

Bob, who was not a church goer, never knew Hawkins well, but he greeted him and his wife affably and invited them in.

"Yes, we can't stay long, but I do want to see your darling house," Mrs. Hawkins gushed, "and the Captain has something he wishes to discuss with you."

Mrs. Hawkins reached the height of her ambition when she married a minister. She went through life

with a kind of condescending pity for every woman who had not been so fortunate. She made friends because of her cheerful satisfaction with life. Some called it smugness, but it was a positive quality that never asked for sympathy, and many found her stimulating.

While Dutch took her over their house, Bob talked to Hawkins in the living room. They touched lightly on the war. Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins, who had both been in the army, had never been out of England. They mentioned demobilization and post-war problems. They felt the conversational stream running low and welcomed Dutch and Mrs. Hawkins when they came in, Mrs. Hawkins saying, "A darling house! No wonder Mr. and Mrs. Emerson would have liked to stay here."

"They are going to stay here," Dutch said as they seated themselves. "Bob and I both feel honored to have them."

Mrs. Hawkins looked at her husband. It was one of those looks between a husband and wife that said a volume, without a word or sound. Bob saw it and looked at Dutch. Dutch saw it and looked at Bob. They looked back at their guests and waited.

Captain Hawkins cleared his throat. He assumed his pulpit voice. "My dear friends, we wished to talk confidentially to you,—we are so anxious to avoid hurting Brother and Sister Emerson."

Bob felt himself stiffen. There was something

in the tone of the man's voice that he did not like. He waited and he knew he was waiting on the defensive. He looked at Dutch. Her slight body was stiffly erect. Her eyes were very bright and keen. A slight warmth toward her bubbled up in him at the assurance they would agree on anything about the Emersons.

Mr. Hawkins cleared his throat, "You understand that Mr. Emerson has been retired. He just filled in here for the duration?"

Neither Bob nor Dutch made any comment. Mrs. Hawkins rustled her silk slip.

"Now, he must make way for the men who have been overseas," Mr. Hawkins continued.

"Has he objected?" Bob asked.

"Not at all! Not at all!" Mr. Hawkins was very hearty. "He has been a wonderful man in his day."

"And he's wonderful yet," Little Dutch said simply but positively.

"No doubt! No doubt!" There was reserve in Mr. Hawkins' voice.

Mrs. Hawkins rustled her slip again. "The Captain feels those who have been overseas must be considered now."

"Well, what's the trouble?" Bob asked flatly.

Mr. Hawkins faced him. "We've heard that Brother and Sister Emerson planned to spend the winter here—in your house."

"That is what we hope they will do."

Captain Hawkins got up. He walked to the window and stood with his back to the light. "My wife and I have been overseas. We feel we deserve some consideration. After all, Brother and Sister Emerson have lived in comparative luxury here at home all these difficult years."

"Well, what do you want to do?" Bob sounded exasperated. "Turn them out to do a little freezing and starving? You know Emerson was at the first Great War—right in France—up to the front line." Bob knew he was hitting from the shoulder and that was what he wished to do.

Mr. Hawkins motioned with the back of his hand as if brushing something away. "No doubt he did good work. No doubt at all. My wife and I have never questioned that, but two heads in one church are too many. Brother Emerson could no doubt find some church where he would be a real asset—but here, where he has been leader, he could easily cause a split—and as I said, my wife and I—"

Bob added for him, "have been overseas and you think you deserve consideration."

"Just so! Just so, Bob!" Captain Hawkins spoke as if greatly relieved. "You have been overseas and you know how it is."

"I wonder if I do?" Bob said. He walked to the hearth. Standing, looking down, he said, "I've been blaming the home folks for trying to keep the returned men out of things until they become

normal. You've made me wonder if they are not right."

Mr. Hawkins looked puzzled. "Some of the men who have come back are certainly not normal," he said, "but of course we were not in combat. We were able to keep a normal outlook on things."

"God help the normal," Bob said bluntly. "Did you tell Mr. Emerson you didn't want him here?"

"Well, not exactly as bluntly as that. I explained how we felt though."

"What did he say?" Dutch asked.

"We were a little disappointed in him," Mr. Hawkins spoke regretfully. "He was not as understanding as we expected, but he asked us to explain to you."

"Well, you've explained," Bob said. He heard Dutch gasp and then there was a strained pause.

Mrs. Hawkins rustled her skirt and said, "We must go. I've just loved seeing your darling house, Dutch. I hope we'll see a lot of each other this winter."

"We will not be here," Dutch said. "Bob and I are going to Minneapolis for the winter."

"We will miss you," Captain Hawkins said with a heartiness that belied his words, and soon they were on their way.

Bob wished to talk to Dutch about what had happened and he could see she was eager to discuss it, but some stubborn streak made him say, "I have

to clean the outside of that window," and he hurried out. As he went he saw Dutch pick up the curtain she had been working on and start for the ladder that was just inside the window.

Bob was never able to explain just what his emotions were as he rubbed the outside of that window. He knew that he was in a temper—not all at Hawkins, not all at Dutch, and not all at circumstances. Part of his annoyance was turned on himself. He knew the human necessity to focus dissatisfaction on someone.

Suddenly something hurtled past the window. Bob heard a thud and a groan. Dutch had fallen from the ladder. He dashed into the house. Dutch was on the floor lying perfectly still.

"Darling, are you hurt?" Bob was on his knees beside her.

After what seemed like a long time she opened her eyes, she looked up in surprise, she smiled and said, "Kiss me!"

Bob kissed her and she again fell back unconscious. Bob lifted her gently and carried her to her bed. As he put her down she again opened her eyes.

"Are you hurt, darling?" Bob asked.

"My heart is sore," she said.

Bob felt a stinging back of his eyes. "So is mine, but what about the limbs?"

"I don't know," she tried to feel her leg. "I feel sick."

"You keep still, dear and I'll get Nat."

"He won't come."

"You're right he'll come," Bob hurried off.

In a shorter time than it takes to write this, Bob and Nat were back.

Nat, the doctor, was entirely different from Nat, the returned friend, resting and convalescing. His voice was crisper, his manner more assured. In a few minutes he stepped back, "You are pregnant?"

"Yes!" Dutch acknowledged, her large eyes questioning him.

"You must keep very still or you will have a miscarriage," he said. "You should have the advice of a good doctor, at once."

"I'll take her to the hospital at Milltown," Bob said.

Nat shook his head. "It wouldn't be safe to move her."

"But we could never get a doctor to come out here," Bob protested.

Nat looked thoughtful. "Perhaps Wilton? He's a splendid man."

"That would be wonderful. He's a big man, we couldn't have better." Bob was enthusiastic.

Nat turned to Dutch. "In the meantime you must keep perfectly still. How do you feel?"

She tried to grin. "O. K., doctor. I don't feel

like running a mile, or doing a washing or—but the chickens?” she half rose and fell back.

“What chickens?” Bob asked.

“I want to roast those prairie chickens. They’re all ready for the oven, but I want to make some stuffing and a devonshire cream for dessert and an angel—”

Nat put his hand on her shoulder. “Don’t move. If you wish to go to the bathroom let Bob carry you. As for the culinary duties, give me your instructions and I’ll see what I can do.”

“Thank you, Nat.” Dutch’s dark eyes were raised questioningly to his.

“It is serious,” Nat replied to her unasked question. “We’ll get Wilton’s advice. I’ll get ready to go for him now.”

When Nat left the room Bob looked down at Dutch. “I’m going to bring mother before Nat goes,” he said.

Dutch reached her arms up to him, “Bob, darling!” In a second Bob was sitting on the bed, his arms holding her snuggled against him, his cheek resting on hers, their tears mingling. “Things are too big for me, Bob,” Dutch said when they both had gained some control. “Don’t let us try to talk about them now—later. Just let me feel you close to me—part of me.”

“Very well, darling, whatever you say.”

Later when Bob was driving over to Harrow for

his mother, he gave himself a lecture. He asked himself, "Who are you to think you know what this world should do? You're only a farm boy after all. Millions of people, who know a sight more than you do, are going along, not making any fuss. Thousands of soldiers are home, who did what you did and more. They saw what you did and more. They felt —" but there he stopped. No man knew what the other man felt.

Right there he shook himself. He was so happy to be at one with Little Dutch, he'd let the world go its own merry way to destruction. He'd tried to save the world once. That was enough. He would eat, drink and be merry. He would live for each day as it came. He would—

But as these thoughts raced through his mind, a ray from the lowering sun blazed like a fire in the window of the little school house ahead. Right in the center Bob seemed to see the burning bundle of clippings about returned men. Nothing had been changed. Dutch still thought he was not quite normal. Let her think it. She loved him, so what of it?

What of it? They would have a child—a son perhaps. His son would say to him, "You must have seen what was coming, Dad. What did you do about it?"

Bob winced as he thought, I'll say, "What could I do? I was not a highly educated man. I was only a farmer."

Then he pictured his son saying, "It wasn't highly educated men who changed the thinking of Russia and Germany in one generation. You knew the power of a great idea."

Bob had reached his father's home. His mother came out and he told her what had happened. While he waited for her to get ready to go back with him, he realized that again he was all upset. He recalled Churchill's description of our times, "a grim and ferocious epoch."

Essie Davis crossed the street. She was wearing a bright red dress. She paused and waved to him. He waved back but it was not a hearty wave. It was not an inviting wave. He did not wish to talk to her. He shrugged impatiently. He resented his awareness of her. She sensed his mood and went on.

His mother came out. "What made Dutch fall?" she asked as she got into the car.

"I don't know," Bob said. "Hawkins and his wife had been there and we were much annoyed with them."

"That wouldn't make her fall," Mrs. Harrow said flatly. "A pregnant woman shouldn't go up on a ladder."

"You know then?" Bob asked surprised.

"Dutch told me she thought she was pregnant. I hope this won't be serious. She was so happy about it."

Bob suddenly had a let down, lonely feeling.

Dutch had evidently told his mother before she told him. She had no doubt wished to spare him this excitement. What other things were they keeping from him? How much of life was he being fenced out of until he was considered normal? He had a sudden desire to smash something.

"Where is Nat?" his mother raised her voice. "I've asked you twice. Wouldn't he do anything for Dutch?"

"Yes. He says there is danger of a miscarriage. He is going to bring Dr. Wilton, who is one of the best."

It was supper time when Nat and Dr. Wilton arrived.

Dr. Wilton was a middle aged man. He was simple, and he inspired confidence. Bob, who had met him before, liked him very much. He could see that Dutch trusted him at once. Dr. Wilton asked Nat to remain with him while he examined Dutch. Once in awhile, he spoke to him about her condition. When he had finished he stepped back and said, "Well, little girl, you have rather a serious choice. If you wish to bear this child, I think you will have to spend the next seven months in bed. If you carry on as usual you stand a good chance of losing it." He hesitated and added, "I can't promise that you won't lose it anyway."

Dutch's dark eyes grew very large. "Thank you,

doctor." Then when Nat and the doctor left, she said, "Bob, your mother has supper ready. You go out and have your supper. Close the door, dear."

"No, I'll stay with you," Bob reached for a chair.

"And miss the prairie chickens?" Dutch's puckish grin appeared. "No. You'd be thinking about it all the time. I can smell them and they're good." She sniffed. "Run along, dear. I think maybe I'll have a sleep."

Bob looked doubtfully at her. "Honest Injun?" She nodded, "Honest Injun!"

As he hesitated, Colonel came running in whining. Bob picked him up and held him toward her. "Would you like Colonel to stay with you?"

Dutch reached out and patted Colonel's head. "Colonel likes chicken. You take him with you, and close the door, dear."

Bob went out. He closed the door. Outside of it he stood holding the dog that was remarkably quiet in his arms. He was thinking, "Yes, there are times when we have to be alone. She has no place right now even for you, Colonel, you faithful little cuss." He patted the dog. "You haven't much in that little doggie brain of yours but love, but by gosh you'd never let her down." But what would let her down? What was loyalty? What did one human being owe another?

Anger rose in him. It swept over him like a hot

wave. He stamped across the hall and through the living room holding Colonel so tight the dog whined.

After supper Nat took Dr. Wilton to the station. Bob helped his mother wash the dishes and then he went out to see whether Job had done the chores. He found his hired man and Sarah highly excited. Job said he had seen an atom. In fact, he said he'd seen a nest of them all sailing around like a Universe. He said it was only for a second, but if he sat and looked long enough he'd see it again and for longer this time.

Bob had quite a bit on his mind that he wanted to say about so much sitting, but he greatly needed Job and Sarah to milk the cows and feed the stock, and it was hard to get anyone who understood stock to come to the country for the winter. So advising Job not to neglect the stock, he left him and Sarah to go on with their search for an atom and he went out for a walk.

There was no moon but the stars were very bright. There was something familiar about the night. Bob felt as if he had lived it before. He walked on vaguely trying to recall where. Suddenly he saw it again. He saw the stirring in the grass, he heard the shots fired, he heard Buffer stifle a groan, he saw him shove on—into the face of death.

Yes. It was like the night Buffer died, only the stars seemed further away and colder somehow. He

couldn't pick them out of the sky and there was no one to throw him one. "I guess I'll have to climb a bit higher before I can reach them," he said right out loud. Then he laughed gruffly. He wondered what he was thinking about. His mind seemed in a muddle. He ran a piece, then he stopped and stood very still. He must think.

No doubt losing the baby would be hard on Dutch. He'd heard women were like that. But as long as she didn't have to do anything except live normally, she would have to accept it as God's will. But would she?

He walked on fast. There was just one thing for her to do. She knew he did not want that child. He had made that very clear. He would not mention it again, but if she loved him it would not be necessary. She must just carry on as usual. He would be careful to see that she was never alone. It seemed as if Fate were playing into his hands.

He returned to find his mother sitting beside Dutch who was lying on the chesterfield in the living room. His mother was knitting. She was counting the stitches, turning the heel of the sock that was for him.

Dutch greeted him prosaically, "Bob, did you ask Sarah if she'd gathered the eggs?"

"I didn't," Bob confessed, as he hung up his cap. "They were too much excited to consider

anything as prosaic as eggs. They've discovered the atom—a whole universe of them."

Mrs. Harrow took a knitting needle out of her mouth and looked at her son. "I don't know how you put up with the Murphys, Bob. They've both got butterflies where they shouldn't be."

Bob laughed. "Dust storms, you mean." He looked at Dutch, "How's the old lady?"

"Fine!" Dutch made room for him to sit down beside her. "We've got to gather those eggs. They're scarce now. They're fifty cents a dozen."

"All right!" he took her hand. "Remind me in the morning."

"I've been thinking you could get Mary Carpenter for the winter," Mrs. Harrow was tapping her lips with a knitting needle. "She's a practical nurse and a good housekeeper. She won't be cheap, but you can depend on her. She could sleep down in the old house. The Murphys are not using it all."

Bob felt himself stiffen. His mother was taking for granted that Dutch would try to save the life of their child. Or, had Dutch made her decision? He couldn't think that. She was too considerate of him. She wouldn't do that.

Before he could say anything more there was a step at the door. It was Bob's father. "What's up here?" he demanded. He came in, walked over and looked down at Dutch. "What have you been doing, young lady?"

Dutch grinned impishly up at him. "Just falling off a ladder. I deserve to be spanked."

"You certainly do," Mrs. Harrow shook her finger at her. "She tried to kill your grandchild."

"My grandchild!" Mr. Harrow peered down at his daughter-in-law. "Did she say my grandchild?"

There was nothing impish in Dutch's smile as she said, "That's what she said."

Mr. Harrow straightened up. He looked at Bob. "We can't have that," he said. "We can't have that. Did you get a doctor?"

"We've had the best there is—Dr. Wilton. He attended Nat and he was going through. He wanted to check up on him. So Nat drove him across from Milltown to Standhope to catch the train on the other line. He had supper here."

"What did he say about this little girl?"

"He said she'd have to spend the next six or seven months in bed," Mrs. Harrow said.

"That'll slow you down," Mr. Harrow patted her shoulder, "but it will soon pass." He turned toward Bob, "Puts a kybosh on your trip, son?"

"Oh, no!" Dutch answered. "Bob will take the course he planned."

Bob looked at her. "And what about you?"

Before she could answer there was a knock at the door. Bob opened it. It was Mr. and Mrs. Emerson.

After all the usual things had been said and

there was a pause in the conversation Bob said, "We had a call from Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins."

Mr. Emerson laughed. "Yes, Bob, and I've discovered I'm not as good a Christian as I should be."

"How is that?" Bob's voice had a lilt in it.

"I told Brother Hawkins politely but firmly that mother and I were not going to get out to please them, even if they had been overseas, unless you wished it."

"Good for you," Bob said.

"Of course all our plans will have to be changed now on account of Dutch," Mrs. Emerson said placidly but decidedly.

"Oh, I'm so sorry." Dutch did not deny it.

Bob looked his astonishment. He had heard nothing said about Dutch's condition or any change of plans, and yet he could feel custom and tradition settling down around them all, without it even being mentioned. It was like some great force standing in the background imposing a certain line of conduct, regardless of all human plans and desires.

But in himself he felt a fierce revolt against this thing. He was not going to accept this straight jacket of conduct. That was the very thing against which he was struggling. Yet, there was Dutch. He was responsible for her condition and she was apparently accepting it as the normal—and the

normal as the only thing to do. He tried to concentrate on what Mr. Emerson was saying.

"I've had an offer from Clinton College in Minneapolis. They want me to lecture on history, but I would have to live in the college and I don't know what mother would do."

Mrs. Harrow looked up quickly, "I have it." Her voice had a ring in it, "If Bob and Mr. Emerson are going to Minneapolis, why couldn't Mrs. Emerson stay with Dutch? It would be perfect for Dutch. Wouldn't it, Dutch?"

Color flooded Dutch's face. Her eyes shone. She looked at Mrs. Emerson. There was a kind of awe in her voice. "It would be wonderful—but it is too much to ask." Her eyes were on the older woman.

Mrs. Emerson sat very still for a full minute. Then, her eyes probing deeply into Dutch's, she asked. "Hadn't you better think this over? Make sure it is what you want?"

"I don't need to think it over," Dutch said simply. "It would be wonderful."

"Then, that's what we'll do." Mrs. Emerson turned and beamed at her husband, "I told you, Joseph, something would turn up."

"Yes, my dear, you did," Mr. Emerson agreed.

"That should leave your mind easy, Bob," Mrs. Harrow looked at her son.

Bob did not answer. He felt the coils of circumstance closing around him like steel wires. He

wanted to strike out at the invisible forces shaping his life. He sprang up and went out. Mr. Emerson followed him. He began to walk down the lane, Mr. Emerson was walking with him.

They walked for an hour. Mr. Emerson said, "I like the smell of newly ploughed earth."

Bob grunted and after a long time he said, "Listen!" They stopped. It was the weird lonely cry of a coyote. They walked on. When they finally neared home Mr. Emerson said, "Seems the earth broods over things at night and it has different moods."

"She has plenty reason to brood," Bob mumbled as they approached the door. He stopped to say, "I'm glad you are coming with me to Minneapolis, Sir!"

"Thank you!" They shook hands before they entered the house.

When the guests had gone and Bob and Dutch were in their room, Dutch already in bed and Bob preparing for bed, Dutch asked, "What did you and Mr. Emerson talk about, Bob?"

"We didn't talk," Bob said. He was pulling his shirt off over his head.

"What did you do?"

"We walked."

"Bob!"

"Yes."

"Come where I can see your face."

Bob walked to the foot of her bed. He was turning his shirt, right side out.

Dutch pulled herself up in bed, the quilts around her, her arms around her knees. "Bob, look at me so I can see your eyes."

Bob placed his hands on the footboard of her bed and looked at her.

"I'm not dodging, Bob, I know how you feel."

Bob did not move or speak.

"I know you think it is a crime to bring a child into the world we have now. It's crazy to be studying to improve methods of killing and of preserving and saving life at the same time. I know the scientists say if men don't stop killing each other, the insects will inherit what is left of the earth. I know you believe we should stop everything until we find out how men can live together and work together in peace." She had talked so fast, she had to stop for breath.

Still Bob just looked at her. He did not move or speak.

She went on, but in another voice. "I know that by trying to save the life of our child, I will upset your plans. I will put Mr. Emerson out of a home. I will cost you a lot of money and I may bring a child into the world to be shot or blown into nothingness."

Still Bob did not move or speak and Dutch went on.

"In my head I know those things. Maybe the earth itself has only a little while longer, I know that in my head," she tapped her forehead. "I know you think I am yielding to the physical, mere animal joy of bringing a child into the world for in that a woman blooms and realizes part of her destiny, but not all, for my heart tells me I am losing you." She put her hands over her heart. "But something is making me try to save that life that is not yet a life." She tossed the quilts off and swung her feet out of the bed. "Oh, Bob, what makes me like this? I don't know what makes me like this! Bob, can't you tell me what makes me like this?"

There was a lonely lost note in her voice that made Bob think of the weird cry of the coyote. "Is it your religion?" he asked thickly.

"No!" Dutch said firmly. "I didn't think about whether it was right or wrong."

Bob lifted her back into bed and covered her. She put her arms around him and they held each other. Bob said finally, "I guess you are right. I must be nuts. Nat believes if he discovers what causes cancer, he will have discovered what life is. You want your child more than anything." He walked to the window and stood looking into the darkness. "I'm feeling in the dark for something no one has ever found—something all men will follow"—he laughed gruffly. "I haven't as much sense as Job and Sarah. They at least know what they want."

He turned back, "I'm fool enough to be looking for a Pied Piper." He looked deep into Dutch's eyes, "Say the word and I'll not go, sweetheart."

But as he spoke Dutch's arms loosened. "It wouldn't be any use, Bob," she said simply. "It wouldn't be any use, darling, you've heard the Piper. Maybe we'll find each other when we get there!"

"Get where?"

"Wherever we are going," she said simply.

## IV

BOB HARROW took a room near the University. He had registered for a course in psychology and a course in science. His reason told him that science could find no answer to the atomic bomb, but there were so many things for science yet to discover that it fascinated him and he took it more for relaxation than as a help to solve the problem he faced. Besides, he wished to keep busy.

At first he had been greatly excited. Overseas, when a prisoner, he had sometimes wondered, amid the mud and the blood and the dirt and the filth, whether any human being could go through that, day after day and come back with a clean and wholesome outlook on life. He had tried to keep his

mind on his dreams of a university course. The campus, the merry laughter, the gowned students flitting here and there, but as time ate off days and weeks and months and years of his life, there were moments when he felt beaten, through, washed up—moments when he felt that nothing mattered. It was at such moments that Dutch had been a tower of strength.

Now that he was back and had all these things, there were times when a strange loneliness gripped him; a kind of lost feeling, as if the world he left had gone and there was no other to take its place. He felt old, disillusioned with these young people. He could scarcely believe they felt as they appeared to feel about many things. He did not fit in. It was in such a mood he had called up Mr. Emerson and invited him over.

Bob had a little alcove in the corner of his room where he had an electric plate on which he could make a cup of tea. He had two good cups and a cracked one, saucers and spoons, and he had brought in some doughnuts. He remembered that Dutch always made doughnuts when the Emersons were coming.

He took the doughnuts out of the bag and arranged them on a plate. He set out the cups and the teapot and the tea. He went to the bathroom and filled the tea-kettle with water. A pleasurable feeling of excitement filled his little room. A visit from Mr.

Emerson would be like a bit of home. It made him feel closer to Dutch. He stood at the door and looked around. It wasn't much of a place compared to the living room at home, with the grate fire and the whole room twinkling down at him from the mirror above the mantel, and Dutch there.

There was a knock at the door. Mr. Emerson had arrived.

"I was glad to get your invitation," Mr. Emerson was holding his hand. "I thought you'd be very busy or I'd have looked you up before."

"Come in! Here, let me take your coat. Sit right there. I'd have called you sooner, only I knew you'd be busy getting started."

Mr. Emerson seated himself beside the small table and picked up a book. He glanced from it to say, "I haven't been too busy to be a bit lonesome at times."

Bob laughed understandingly. "Me, too!" he said. He sat down in a straight-backed chair opposite his guest. "How are you liking your work?"

"Very well! Very well indeed!" Mr. Emerson's voice was convincing. "If I had mother here, I'd be very happy. How is it with you?"

Bob's brow knit. "I guess I'm hard to satisfy," he said. "Everyone seems so young, so academic. They are studying as if they had a lifetime ahead—there is no urgency—no sense of the approaching danger. Did you see that article by Dr. Orlando

Park in Science magazine?" He reached under some books for the magazine, as he spoke.

"No, I haven't seen it." Mr. Emerson settled back comfortably in the worn leather upholstered chair and interlaced his fingers.

"There is still time to preserve the species," Dr. Park says, "But not very much time is available for ensuring its dominance in the long future." Bob closed the magazine over his finger. He says "Man is fourth in line of succession among major rulers of the earth. Preceding him were the fishes, the dinosaurs and the giant mammals to whom he is cousin."

"Dinosaurs were some of them competent killers." Bob went on giving a summary of the article, "but it remained for man to show real progress in the destruction of his own kind.

"He's right there," Mr. Emerson agreed. "Go on."

Bob read. "On the day the atomic bomb was discussed over the radio, the Rockefeller Foundation was appropriating money for the study of cancer. We increase the average span of life, ward off infection with sulfa derivatives and penicillin and render living less arduous by all manner of labor saving machines.

"In general, man is learning to kill or hurt more people in less time, and to patch them up more efficiently than ever before.

"Such a state of affairs is ridiculous," Dr. Park said, "and there is no ground for the supposition that this state of affairs can continue very long. Unless men stop killing each other off, the insects will inherit the earth!"

"I've seen a number of articles along the same line," Mr. Emerson said. "People are becoming conscious of our danger."

"But they are spending their time, trying to get back to where we were," Bob said. "They are dropping into the appeasement mood. They are shutting their minds to facts, while we rush straight to destruction."

"What can we do?" Mr. Emerson asked.

"I don't know," Bob said. "I feel like a voice crying in the wilderness, with nothing but a cry."

"What is man that thou art mindful of him?" Mr. Emerson quoted.

Bob looked at him, "My question is, 'What is man?'"

Mr. Emerson straightened. "Mine is, why did this happen now? Why did God, after all these generations, suddenly reveal to man the secret of the earth and put into his hands the power to destroy, not only his own kind, but the very earth itself. There must be a reason, Bob."

"If there is a God," Bob said.

"If there isn't, there is nothing. We have chaos. We may just as well give up struggling and go

merrily down the stream to our death and the end of civilization."

"I guess you're right," Bob agreed doubtfully. Then with a shrug as if shifting a burden from his shoulders, he asked, "Have you heard from home?"

"I certainly have," Mr. Emerson spoke heartily. "Mother is very happy with Dutch. She says she is even beginning to like Nat."

Bob laughed heartily. "I can't imagine anyone not liking Nat once they understand him. He's the stuff of which great men are made."

"Mother says he's beginning his experiments. He has a cage of rats and—"

"Dutch didn't tell me that," Bob interrupted. "She's so happy to have Mrs. Emerson that she took all her time to tell me about that and Job and Sarah."

"What are Job and Sarah doing?" Mr. Emerson asked with interest.

Bob hesitated. "I'm not very clear about it, but I believe Job has made a magnifying glass through which things, like a bit of earth, look kind of weird. They are going around to little groups telling them that what they see through this glass are atoms, and they are making a charge for a look. Dutch is afraid they may soon refuse to do the chores."

"There will no doubt be plenty of fakers around," Mr. Emerson said. "But if they are all as simple as Job and Sarah, they won't do much harm."

"If they walk out on Dutch and Nat, it won't be so good," Bob said.

They chatted, mentioning this one and that at Harrow. It seemed to bring home closer, just to mention familiar names and places. Bob recalled some of the happenings when he was going to school. Dan Simpson's horse was drowned and the Simpson children were riding it at the time, but were saved by quick thinking and acting on young Dan's part. "Young Dan was killed in Greece," Bob said.

A chill and unrest crept into the room with that statement. Mr. Emerson changed the subject. "I've heard that Hawkins and his wife are not very happy at Harrow. They don't seem able to fit back into the life."

"Swelled heads!" Bob said laconically.

"Well, whatever it is," Mr. Emerson looked troubled, "they are not happy and so not able to do their best work. I've been wondering! I wanted to ask your opinion," he rested his hand on the table and looked at Bob. "Clinton College is looking for a secretary. I was asked if I could recommend someone. I think he could fill the bill, but if he knew I'd recommended him, he'd no doubt think I was trying to get him out of Harrow."

Bob looked intently at Mr. Emerson. "Do you care what he thinks?"

Mr. Emerson returned his look but he appeared to be seeing inward as he said, "I believe mean

thoughts have more power in this world than we ordinarily realize. If I could—”

They were interrupted by a knock at the door. Bob opened it. “Hello, Dave! Come in. I want you to meet a friend of mine. This is Mr. Emerson. I told you about him. This is Dave Sheriff, Mr. Emerson.”

“How do you do?” Dave’s voice was flat and a little hard. He stopped just inside the door, and ignored Mr. Emerson’s extended hand.

He was a slight, fair, sensitive looking young, old man. Bob was explaining, “Dave has just come back from Hong Kong. He is finishing his University course.”

“Are you enjoying it?” Mr. Emerson asked.

“No!” Dave said.

“How long were you a prisoner?” Mr. Emerson asked.

“Years and years! A lifetime.”

“Sit here, Dave.” Bob shoved his chair forward, but Dave did not move.

“Well, I’m sure you were glad to get back,” Mr. Emerson said with feeling.

“I was glad to get away from Hong Kong,” Dave said, “but I wasn’t glad to get back.”

Mr. Emerson leaned forward. A keen enquiring look came into his eyes. “Why?” he asked simply.

Dave met his eyes squarely. “To get back you

must have been here before," he said dully. "I was never here before."

Bob explained. "Dave means he is not the fellow who went away."

"I'm sure he isn't," Mr. Emerson agreed. "It would be a poor lookout for humanity if he were."

"They tell me I'll soon be normal again," Dave said. "They mean, like I was." He laughed.

"They mean, like they are," Bob said, and in his voice was a bitter note.

"We went away to do a big job, and we did what we could," Dave said. "By gad we did what we could." He slapped the fist of his right hand into the palm of his left with a smack. "We lived through it and we grew old doing it. Maybe we're gnarled and a bit twisted out of the ordinary shapes—but we are what we are." He turned and walked away without a further word.

Bob shut the door when Dave's footsteps faded down the hall and a door slammed. "Dave is finding living tough," he said. "I've tried to get him interested in what may save the earth from destruction, but he's too tired. He's worn out. He says he'll let the next generation save the earth. He's done enough. I've tried to make him see that will be too late. I've tried to make him see that the next generation won't know. It will go along as we did, make the same mistakes, only it will end everything. We've dug the pit for it to fall into."

"His idea is to let it fall," Mr. Emerson said.

Bob nodded, but did not answer. Already he felt so much at home with this man that they could enjoy a silence together. Then Mr. Emerson told him about his classes and Bob told the minister about groups to whom he had spoken about the atomic bomb. "I'm afraid people will get the idea I know a lot more about it than I do," he said finally. "But when I think of what ideas did in Germany and Russia I feel I must not miss an opportunity to stir people up to a realization of the seriousness of the situation. Only I've nothing positive to offer them. Nothing positive."

"I wish I could be more help." Mr. Emerson stood up. "I wish I had something clear cut to offer. If I could see why this happened now, I think it would make everything plain." He sat down again.

Bob was leaning across the small study table. "That is where I am weak. That is where I fail. I have nothing definite to offer and the world is calling for a way out."

"And while the world calls for a solution it is working frantically to perfect its powers of destruction."

"And its ability to patch up the physical wrecks it makes." Bob laughed shortly. "Let us forget it. I met Essie Davis at a small group I was talking to last week. You know her, don't you? She appears interested in the atomic bomb."

"Yes, I got to know her rather well during her mother's last illness." Mr. Emerson's voice was low and kindly, but in it there was a kind of reserve that stirred Bob's curiosity.

"I asked her to drop in if she happened to be passing this evening. She seemed so anxious to see you when I told her you were in town."

Mr. Emerson did not speak, but he glanced around the small room.

Bob laughed. "You can chaperone us if you think that is necessary. You know Essie and I fought our way through school together."

Mr. Emerson laughed, but his laugh was not comfortable.

Bob felt impatient with what he considered old fashioned ideas about men and women. He had nowhere but his room to meet his friends, unless they went to a restaurant or night club. Essie had suggested going to the Meadow Lake, a rather select and very expensive night club, with not too good a reputation, but he hadn't money to spend in that way. She had asked him to be her guest but that he had refused to do. "Essie seems to have plenty of money," he said. "I don't know where she gets it."

"I believe her husband's people are wealthy. They make her a fair allowance, but they don't acknowledge her socially. She resents it very much." Mr. Emerson explained. "She's bitter."

"Oh, is that it?" Bob asked. "She's up to something. I was wondering what it was."

"I don't know anything about that," Mr. Emerson said quickly. "But she's a remarkable woman, Bob."

"What?" Bob gasped. "Essie Davis remarkable? Oh, you are mistaken, sir. She's bad tempered, and a bit vindictive—but—"

"I like her very much," Mr. Emerson said firmly. "Her devotion to her mother was beautiful. That girl has tremendous possibilities for either good or evil."

Bob put the kettle on to boil. He sat down and looked at Mr. Emerson. "That's a new angle on one of the home girls," he said. "Remarkable. We always considered the Davis' family a bit common."

"Yes!" Mr. Emerson tapped the tips of his fingers together. "Did it ever strike you, Bob, that maybe some of the home folks are not the folks you left?"

"I guess maybe you're right," Bob agreed finally, "but Essie—"

"Has been through more than most," Mr. Emerson said. "She is a girl with a one track mind. She has terribly strong passions—if she loves, it is with everything she has. If she hates, it is with her whole self. I can't tell you any more, Bob, but Essie Davis is not negligible."

"Well, this is a new idea," Bob looked his

surprise. "Looks like Essie has been telling you some of her tall yarns."

"Maybe!" Mr. Emerson agreed. He smiled, but his smile was serious.

As Bob made the tea he explained. "I've felt for quite a few years that Essie has a grudge against me for something that was not altogether my fault, but I think she blames me. I was surprised to see her at my meeting and at her friendliness. I thought maybe she was lonesome."

Bob had the tea made when there was a light tap at the door. It was Essie Davis.

"I hope you are not shocked," she twinkled up at Mr. Emerson as they shook hands. "I was a bit homesick when Bob told me you were coming, so I took a chance."

"I think I can chaperone you all right," Mr. Emerson said and he insisted on her taking the big chair.

Bob could see that he liked Essie and there was in his manner something protective, as if he felt it necessary to shield her. He could see that Essie liked the minister, a liking that was almost reverence and reverence was not part of her make-up. In fact he had never known a more irreverent girl. His curiosity was stirred. He studied Essie from a new angle. Her features were not regular. Her nose was short and upturned. Her mouth was large and her expression had an impish quality.

She wore a plain brown dress and shoes that seemed to have nothing but their plainness and yet, her appearance was striking. Bob wondered how she did it. Partly her hair that she wore high on her head. It gleamed with hidden lights. Partly her figure, that was almost perfect—and partly a breezy untamed something in her manner and in her eyes, that challenged the imagination.

Demure and modest, she seemed the personification of propriety as she sat drinking her tea and eating a doughnut. After a slight pause in the conversation, she looked at Bob and asked, "Are you still working on the atomic bomb?"

"No, I'm not working on it," Bob said firmly. "What gave you the idea I was?"

Color crept up Essie's neck and spread over her face. "Well, you did work on it."

"That was before the war was over," Bob said, "and I didn't know anything about it really. I was just doing one little thing."

"What was that?" Essie leaned forward, her eyes intent on him. Something tense in her voice and manner startled Bob and Mr. Emerson.

Bob laughed. "It would take me too long to explain. Why are you so interested?"

Essie flushed. She straightened and took a sip of tea. "I'm not any more interested than anyone else," she said. She looked at Mr. Emerson. "I heard Bob lecture about the danger the earth is in.

He seems to be trying to scare people, but he didn't tell them what to do."

"I told them to stop travelling the old trails and use their heads to find a new road," Bob said.

Essie laughed. She had a tinkling laugh that was a strange mixture of the gurgle of water and the tang of metal. "Most folks have never used their heads except to get things or to get power. They don't know how to use them for anything else." She leaned back. "I don't know how to think any other way, but boy—the fellow who gets the secret of the atomic bomb will have something." She stood up in her excitement.

"What will he have?" Bob asked.

"He'll be master of the world," Essie's eyes were large, bright and hard. "Lords and Ladies, Kings and Queens and Presidents won't count. It will be the man with the bomb who can crack the whip over the world and the world will have to dance to his tune."

"No man, or group of men is going to get it, except the government," Bob said.

"Don't be too sure," Essie sat down, her mouth set in a firm line.

"Don't think about things like that, Essie," Mr. Emerson begged.

"I can't think any other way," she said.

"Yes you can, Essie," Mr. Emerson was leaning

toward her. "You have unrealized power if you would only use it right."

Essie put her cup on the table. She stood up and began to button her coat. "You are the only person who ever had faith in me," she said. "If I'd met you sooner—who can tell. It's too late now. Well, I must go. I'm so glad to have seen you." She held out her hand to Mr. Emerson.

"I must go, too," he stood up. "Which direction are you going?"

"I need a breath of fresh air," Bob said. "I'll see you both on your way."

As Mr. Emerson put on his coat he said, "There is a lecture at Clinton College next Wednesday night, Bob, that I'd like you to hear. I want you to come and have dinner with me first."

"Thanks very much. What is it on?" Bob asked as he went for his coat.

"It is about 'Men who have walked with God and their message.' They are the mystics who have stormed the gates of heaven while still in the flesh, counting life a brief illusion, necessary as a training ground, but dangerous as a lover."

"Thanks very much," Bob's voice lacked enthusiasm. "I'd like to see you, but these chaps reached heights I'd never strive to attain, even if I were religious. I want something a bit more earthy."

"It wouldn't hurt you to hear about them," Mr.

Emerson said as he reached under his overcoat to pull down his coattail.

"Right you are!" Bob agreed. "I'll be glad to go."

Bob and Essie accompanied Mr. Emerson to his bus stop. When his bus came and he waved a farewell Essie mumbled, "That man almost makes me believe in a God."

"He certainly thinks a lot of you," Bob said.

Essie grunted. "He knows only one side of me. If he knew the other," she stopped on the sidewalk and faced Bob. "Don't ever tell him."

"Tell him what?" Bob asked.

"What like I am inside of me," Essie said flatly.

Bob caught her arm. "What like are you?" he asked with a laugh as they walked on.

"I'm the vindictive cat you know," Essie said, "only more so." She stopped. They were passing a church. It was tall, and dark and gloomy, with a graveyard around it. "That's what religion meant to me until I got to know Mr. Emerson," she said. "A great gloomy pile, where they won't let the sunlight in, and with dead people all around and God sitting someplace, getting a lot of kick out of sending most folks to hell."

Bob laughed. "I guess that was something of my idea, too. Seemed to me a lot of folks were just as mean and grasping as they wished to be for most of their lives, but as soon as they knew they were

going to die they began to howl for mercy. I made up my mind I'd be the way I lived. I'm not going to whine when I have to pay up."

Evidently Essie was not listening for she said, "My mother was afraid and Mr. Emerson helped her to feel she hadn't a thing to be afraid of. Bob, my mother was laughing with Mr. Emerson when she died, and there are people who would call her a terrible sinner. But he said she wasn't—he said—" Essie's voice was thick, "Bob, I'd do anything for that man. I'd give my life for him."

Before Bob could reply Essie's bus drew to a stop in front of them. Essie said, "I'll let you know where to meet me. Good-night!"

Bob turned back. He was strangely stirred. Essie in such a mood was new to him. He had not promised to meet her, but she took for granted he would. He would like to see more of her. It seemed he did not really know her, strange that! He had known her all his life, and yet he did not know her. He stopped. Maybe there was something there. A couple walking behind bumped into him.

"I beg your pardon," the man said, but his voice was gruff.

"I beg your pardon," Bob replied and he walked on. He remembered that when he was a very small boy, one of his teachers said that every person we spoke to or touched, or even saw had an influence in shaping our lives. He wondered idly how much he

had shaped the lives of that couple and how much they had shaped his. Not much use trying to appraise that, but when he looked around in a few minutes he did not know where he was.

He walked on until he came to what looked like a small park. He tried the gate. It opened. A dim light from the street pointed along a path. He followed it until he saw a seat in a dark corner among some evergreens. He went over and sat down.

There was no moon, but the stars were very bright. A deep roar, that was the voice of the city, was thinned of its savage note by distance and he could feel the night, trying to hush restless humanity to rest.

Bob was a country boy. He loved the seasons. He liked day and night. He had no desire to turn day into night and night into day. He liked to feel the air around his body. It was cold, but it was clear and pure. He and Dutch often walked in the crisp, clean air. They both enjoyed it. She would enjoy this.

Then strangely enough he felt her very close to him. Involuntarily he put out his arm as she seemed to snuggle against him. "Comfy, darling?" he asked so low it was like the sighing voice of a breeze playing through the pines. "Listen, darling, and you'll hear the heart of the city beating, now high, now low! It sounds like a mother crooning her baby to sleep."

## — V —

BOB was in Mr. Emerson's room at Clinton College. Mr. Emerson had gone to answer the telephone that was in the hall just outside his door. They had recently returned from the lecture—on the mystics—and Bob was more depressed than he could ever remember to have been.

He had listened to the more or less familiar stories of Lao-tse, Francis of Assisi, Fra Angelica and the others right down to the greatest called Christ. It was a mere handful of men, who had beseiged the very gates of heaven to prove that there is a God. But they had kept burning the lamp of faith, that in Him we have our being and in a realization of Him lies our destiny and salvation. Those men

seemed as far above Bob as the stars in the sky and that he had even dared to point humanity toward one of the mysteries others had sought with prayer and fasting, seemed presumption beyond words.

"I guess I am a bit touched in the head," he said when Mr. Emerson returned. "I'm not made of big stuff. I'm just made of ordinary stuff. I never aimed to pick the diamonds out of the sky. I just kind of thought I could be a beater—you know, one of those fellows who go ahead of the hunters and drive the game into the open."

"Why not?" Mr. Emerson asked heartily.

"I just thought I could maybe make people see there isn't any core to life as it is now. At least that's how I see it. I thought—" Bob just couldn't stop talking.

"Let us go for a walk," Mr. Emerson suggested. "I think the fresh air will do us good."

Bob agreed, but when they were walking he was still talking. "When we went into a battle," he said, "we were scared. No denying that. But we went on, keeping as close to the fellow next us as we could, with a need, in the midst of all that hate and killing, for someone who knew us and liked us. Then, when we got through, a great exhilaration swept over us. We wanted to go right on and clean out the whole damned dirty mess."

He stopped and faced Mr. Emerson, "When I saw where that bomb had been—a great gap in the

earth — gone — not there — nothing — it seemed a mighty simple thing to get out and tell people we must want different things or we won't have an earth to live on. But what if people can't want bigger things! What if man has gone as far as he can! What if he is meant to end here!"

"I don't believe it, Bob," Mr. Emerson said emphatically. "I don't believe that for one split second. I can't give you evidence for my faith that will satisfy you, but it satisfies me perfectly."

"I guess the reason I'm not a Christian," Bob mumbled, "is that I love the earth. I love people. I don't want to be in the world and not of it. Seems to me the earth and everything in it is here for us to enjoy. I don't want to spend my time playing a harp and praising God. If God's the right kind of a fellow he knows how I feel and I don't need to keep telling him. He'd rather I'd get on about whatever business he had for me to do, than have a lot of palaver."

"I agree with you there," Mr. Emerson said.

"I guess I'm a bit down," Bob mumbled. He stopped in the lacy shadow of the bare branches of one of the larger trees on the campus of Clinton College. "I had a letter from Little Dutch today. It was cheerful as usual, but one sentence has haunted me. She said, 'I have a depression in my heart.' "You see," Bob tried to explain, "That economic depression of '29 and '30 went so deep the word

depression gives us the willies. What I've been thinking all day is, that the depression has gone inside our minds instead of our stomachs. There are strikes and revolutions all over the world. Nobody seems satisfied and happy."

"What could you expect?" Mr. Emerson asked. "We talked for six years about a new world after this war. Isn't it natural for people to expect it? Demand it?"

"Sure is!" Bob agreed. "But we're doing just the same old things in the same old way to get it. Can we get it that way?"

Mr. Emerson did not answer and they stood in silence. Across the campus from a brightly lighted building came the gay strains of dance music. "Do you like to dance?" Mr. Emerson asked.

"Yes, I did—I do," Bob stammered, because of his surprise.

"How would you like to go over? Star Benson who arranged this party invited me and anyone I wished to bring."

Bob's first reaction was one of resentment. He thought, "He is trying to calm me down, get me back to normal." Without enthusiasm he said, "O.K. Lead on."

They had barely entered the spacious hall of the Women's residence, when Star Benson came to greet them.

Bob, although not in a mood to be enthusiastic

about any girl, felt his pulse quicken as he danced away with Star.

She was tall, taller than most girls he cared to dance with, but to dance with her made him think of something he had read about the poetry of motion. He did not know that dancing could be so perfect.

After he left her that night he remembered she was all in white; that her hair was shoulder length, and shone like gold; that her skin was like satin and her eyes were blue as the June sky and sparkled like precious stones. But he had to recall those things by an act of will. What he retained as an indelible memory was the impression of a vital spark of life, straight from its source, that had clothed itself in the body of this young girl.

Star Benson carried an atmosphere of warmth and good will as well as an eager outreaching for life and more life. Bob had been with her only a few minutes, when he felt his spirits rising. "You are as good as a tonic," he said in one of the lapses in conversation that did not bother either of them.

"A tonic for what?" Star asked, a flash in her eyes and a lilt in her voice.

"I think you are one of those medicines good for everything," he said.

Star chuckled. "Do I act quickly?"

"I'll say you do," Bob said. "You were in my blood stream in about a second."

They laughed together like children and so it

was all evening. They danced every dance together, although a big dark young man was hovering around most of the time and seemed to resent it. Bob was in a reckless mood and did not care.

Early in the evening Mr. Emerson asked to be excused. He had a lecture to prepare. Star said she had her car and she would leave Bob wherever he wished. When the party was over, Bob said he would go home with Star and help her put her car in the garage. He would walk to his room from there.

"Would you like a run through the park?" Star asked, when they left the campus.

Bob hesitated a second. He would enjoy it. Well, why not? "Sure thing!" he said.

Star stopped the car on the shore of a small lake. On the other side of the road was a clump of pine trees. "Now tell me about your work," she said. "Dr. Emerson says it is very interesting."

"Did he tell you that?" Bob asked.

"He did, and he said I would be interested."

She was the kind of girl Bob could talk to. A little shyly at first, then carried away by her sympathetic listening and her leading questions, he talked almost as he had talked to Little Dutch. Finally he stopped abruptly. He had realized for some time that Star's spirit had been taking fire from his. He knew something of the power of a thought when dropped in fertile soil. This girl was really just a child. "So, we'd better go home," he said

with a laugh. "I sure can be dull without even trying."

"Dull!" Star's voice was a combination of wonder, awe and longing. "I could listen to you forever."

"The only way I can keep you in that frame of mind is to stop right now." Bob laughed again.

"I'm not flattering you," Star said seriously. "I've been looking for something that seemed worth doing, worth living for."

"Don't talk like that," Bob said. "How old are you?"

"Eighteen, almost nineteen."

"Why, you're only beginning to live. Soon you'll be able to travel—go abroad, and—"

"I have been abroad," Star said. "I went to school in Germany. I don't want to go again."

"Then, you'll fall in love—"

"I have been in love," Star interrupted. "I'm divorced."

"Divorced? You, Star?" Bob gasped.

"Yes, I guess I was too eager for life. You see, Bob, girls my age lived hard during the war. I tried to get into the army; I trained to be a pilot; then the war was over. We've lived so much with so much promised and now there doesn't seem to be anything interesting left for us to do. I've sometimes thought I'd go to Russia. The girls over there seem to be doing such big things."

"But they haven't freedom as we know it," Bob objected.

"What good is freedom if there's nothing you want to do with it?" Star asked bluntly.

Bob put his hand over hers. "Poor kid!" he said. "You sound more disillusioned than I am. Now, you must go home."

"But we'll talk again," Star begged. "I'm sure I could help you. I'm sure together we could do big things and we could get lots of girls and boys to help us. Lots and lots of them."

"Yes, we'll talk again some day soon," Bob promised. "Thanks, Star, for a wonderful evening. I'm sure we could do big things if we knew what to do!"

"Then you will let me help you?"

"Sure, when I find anything practical to do," Bob promised. "I just kind of called a strike on Life, but Life doesn't seem to be going to increase my pay or shorten my hours. It just keeps shoving me along."

Star started the car. "You were overseas?" she asked.

"Yes," Bob said dully, "but don't count on me getting back to normal."

Star laughed gaily. "How can there be a normal if we are, as everyone says, building a new world?"

"My idea!" Bob said. "My idea, Star, exactly."

## VI

LITTLE Dutch was sitting in front of the grate fire peeling apples. Nat was lying on the couch. His shoulder, that had been injured by shrapnel, was bothering him more than usual. "Are you satisfied with the way your experiments are behaving?" Dutch asked.

"Most of them are no good," Nat said with a grimace, "but there is one—just one, Little Dutch, that may revolutionize medicine. You know, I'm working with Wilton."

"Yes, I know that. You're searching for the cause of cancer?"

"Well—" Nat rose on his elbow. "That's what we say," he drawled. His eyes were dark wells of light. "But what we're doing, Dutch, is trying to discover

how we grow. If we can find that out we may discover what life is."

Little Dutch dropped her hands to the sides of the pan in which she had the apples. She leaned toward Nat. "That would be almost—maybe more exciting than the atomic bomb, wouldn't it?"

"Sure would," Nat agreed. He tossed off the rug that was covering him and sat up. "That's the way we are coming at it. Man is made of atoms—a mighty queer mixture of them. What kind of atoms are they? How did they get together? Dozens of doctors are working on it, each on some one little part, as each one did on the bomb. I can't explain it to you—because it's too complicated."

"Isn't it exciting, just to be alive?"

"Sure is," Nat agreed. He lay back and looked into the fire. "I hope I'll be able to hold on until we bring all our findings together."

Little Dutch straightened and took up an apple. "Are you not feeling so well, Nat?"

"Oh yes!" Nat tried to sound cheerful. "But I haven't more than five years at best and this may take a long time."

Nat had not referred to his condition before and Dutch felt there was a reason for him doing it now. She went on peeling the apple as she said in a matter-of-fact way. "You must not let anything take you from your research, Nat. I'm glad I can take over some of the work."

"That's bothering me," Nat said. Again he sat up. "I'm not sure I should let you."

Dutch's laugh was merry. "Just how could you stop me?"

Nat half frowned and half laughed and blurted out. "I don't understand you, Dutch. You upset all Bob's plans for the winter so that you could spend most of your time in bed. Now, because Mrs. Hawkins is sick and needs Mrs. Emerson, you have let her go and you are up working around, risking your health and your baby's life."

Dutch put the dish of apples on a table beside her; she rested her elbow on the table and her chin in her hand. She was looking at Nat. "I don't understand myself, Nat. That's the trouble with me. I don't think things through. I just feel them and then I do them. Mrs. Hawkins is very ill and needs Mrs. Emerson so I had to let her go. There are things that have to be done here, and I can do them, so I'm doing them."

"So I've noticed," Nat said drily. "Do you think Bob will understand?"

"I doubt if he will," Dutch said readily. "You see, Nat, I can't feel big things away ahead like Bob does. I know the work around the house has to be done. Other women have to carry on while bearing a child, so I said to myself I can, and that's what I'm doing. If I lose my baby I'll feel awful, but it will seem it couldn't be helped."

"Yes!" Nat's voice said he was waiting.

"But, if I'd gone with Bob and walked a lot and danced and lost my baby that way, I would never have felt just right." She sat for some time looking into the fire before she added. "Seems like I have to walk from what I know to what I don't know—I can't jump over things in the way." She looked up at Nat. "The trouble is, Nat, I'm not big enough in my mind for Bob."

They were interrupted by someone coming in the back door. "That must be Job," Dutch said. "I haven't seen him and Sarah all day. I think they sit up all night and sleep all day."

Job was wearing an overcoat and mitts but no hat. His hair, that was thin on top and long, was dishevelled and added a kind of wildness to his always surprised expression. He began, "You know what, Mrs?"

"No, I don't," Dutch confessed. "What?"

"We've had a call—Sarah and me."

"A call!" Dutch questioned. "What kind of a call?"

"A call to bigger things than feeding and milking cows and such like work. Sarah's been converted!"

"What were you thinking of doing?" Dutch asked.

Job, who was wiping his nose with his sleeve, explained, "You know what, Mrs.? We have a mission. Sarah sings—she can sing great, that girl can, and she can preach, too, and I show the pictures of

the atoms. Earth worshippers we call ourselves. You think that a good name, Mrs.?"

"I shouldn't wonder," Dutch said, "but what are you going to do?"

"We're going to travel around and hold meetings." Job's eyes were shining. "We'll take up collections, we'll—"

"But what will I do?" Dutch asked.

"Well!" Job wiped his nose again on his sleeve. "You see we're going to hold meetings. Dozens a places want us and you know what, Mrs.?"

Dutch waited.

Job fumbled uncertainly. Finally he muttered, "We got to be kind of careful—being of importance—and there is talk about Nat—Mrs. Simpson dying—and Bob going away."

Dutch shoved back her chair and stood up. "What are you talking about, Job?"

Job backed toward the door. "I don't mean any harm, Mrs. I was just saying—"

"Stop right there and tell me exactly, what do you mean?" Dutch was facing him, her eyes blazing.

"You know what, Mrs.?"

"No, but I'm going to." Little Dutch was waiting.

"Well, folks are saying Mrs. Simpson wouldn't a died if Nat had gone to her, and Mrs. McDonald's Dave wouldn't be a cripple if Nat had set his leg."

"Yes, go on!" Little Dutch commanded.

Job shuffled uneasily. "Well, folks say its mighty queer Bob going away and leaving you and Nat here."

Little Dutch stood very still for what seemed a long time. Then she said, "You and Sarah will leave tomorrow and take all your things with you."

"We thought we'd leave our things in the house until—"

"You will get them out tomorrow." Dutch said firmly.

"But, we haven't any place—"

"Put them in storage. You must be out tomorrow. Now go."

Job looked wildly around. "You know what, Mrs.?"

"Yes, I know," Dutch said. "Now go." She followed him to the door and locked it after him. Then she returned to the living room where Nat was standing on the hearth, his good hand gripping the mantel. Their eyes met. "There it is," Dutch said. "They get what they call religion and immediately they begin to think they are better than other people. That isn't religion. That isn't what the Bible teaches."

Nat laughed. "I'm the man who wanted peace. I was determined not to quarrel with anyone."

Dutch sat down. "Sit down, Nat. I shouldn't have been so angry. I knew some people were saying these things. Even Mrs. Harrow, Bob's mother blames you for Mrs. Simpson's death."

"I shouldn't wonder," Nat said.

Dutch was looking into the fire. "Nat, what do you think you'll find if you have five years for research?"

Nat's hand gripped his knee. "I don't know, Dutch, but if they would conscript an army of doctors and set them to work to find what life is, I think we would soon startle the world. We might not find what we are looking for, but we are only on the edge of our knowledge about our bodies. Dutch, I believe the doctors and the theologians will eventually meet in their research. I believe they will yet pool their findings."

"I didn't know you were religious," Dutch said.

"Religious!" Nat said. "What do you mean by religion?"

Dutch looked puzzled. "I don't know as I can tell you," she said. "I guess I mean, do you believe in a God."

"I believe—" Nat hesitated. His hands relaxed and hung down between his knees. "Like Bob, I'm trying to solve this riddle we call life, only I'm coming at it along another trail. I know, if doctors only had time—but always they are worn out doing the job at hand. Like they are trying to force me to do."

"You must not let anything take you away from your work," Dutch said. "Nothing!"

"Who will milk the cows and feed the hens and—"

"I will!" Dutch said. "I was raised on a farm, I can—"

"You must send for Bob."

"No," Dutch was firm. "I won't send for Bob."

"Then I will." Nat straightened up quickly and winced.

"I'll rub some more of that liniment on your shoulder," Dutch said.

"It did help," Nat acknowledged.

Dutch got the bottle and sat down beside Nat, who had taken off his coat and vest and opened his shirt. "Lie down on your right side and I can do it better."

Dutch gave his shoulder a good rubbing. "There, I think that will do." She bent over him to feel for the coat that had slipped down into the back of the couch. Her head was very close to his breast. An involuntary glance up and in the mirror she saw him kiss the top of her head. Their eyes met, a deep red swept over Nat's face. "I beg your pardon, Dutch, I shouldn't have done that."

Dutch just stared for the longest time. Then she laughed. "It's a good thing Job didn't see you do that."

"But I did," a voice from the hall said, triumphantly. It was Mr. Hawkins. He stepped into the living room. "Mrs. Hawkins is very ill. Dr. Swanson can't get here for at least three hours. You must come, Nat, and do what you can."

"I told you before, I'm not a doctor," Nat said firmly. "I could be prosecuted if I gave medical advice. I've told people that over and over."

"You did a lot in the army. You even performed operations. I know a fellow who was in your company. He said he'd rather have you than any doctor he ever saw."

Mr. Hawkins' face was strained and a little wild. He turned to Dutch. "You tell him to come. I'm afraid she'll—" his lips trembled.

Dutch put her hand on his arm. "I'm so sorry, Mr. Hawkins. I wish I could do something. But Nat can't do anything."

Mr. Hawkins shook her hand off. "Very well; I'll do something," he said savagely. "I'll see that Bob and others in this district know that Nat is making love to you and you are encouraging him not to give the help he can to the sick and dying."

Nat sprang to his feet, but Dutch was between them, her eyes blazing. "I'm ashamed of you, Mr. Hawkins. Daring to blackmail me. You will leave now and don't come back until you are ready to apologize." She was shoving him toward the door.

"If it were Bob who was dying, you'd know how I feel," Hawkins was crying.

"There can be dignity even in death," Dutch replied coldly and she closed the door after him.

"I seem to have got you into a mess," Nat said, when Dutch returned. "We must get Bob at once and tell him the whole story."

"We will carry on as usual," Dutch said firmly and she picked up her dish of apples. "I'm known in

this district and I'm not afraid of what anyone can say about me."

Nat, whose eyes never left her face, said, "He was not far out when he said I was in love with you."

Dutch waited a second or two and then asked, "Why are you telling me that, Nat?"

"Because I'm afraid I give it away and I don't want to get you in wrong."

"I'm terribly sorry, Nat. Seems like you've had enough trouble."

"You're not a trouble, Dutch. You're a blessing."

"Then let's forget it." Dutch dimpled. "I'm going to make you some apple dumplings. Mr. Davis sent me some brown sugar and I'll put in a dash of nutmeg."

## ❧ VII ❧

BOB closed his text book and tossed it across the table. He had been working all afternoon with one part of his mind waiting to drag him back to a conversation he had with Essie Davis the day before. She was waiting for him when he came from his lecture. They went to a small restaurant near the University and she asked him if he wished to make money.

"I sure do," he said. He had been feeling restless and dissatisfied with life. He didn't seem to be getting anywhere and he would soon have to make up his mind whether he was going to work the farm. His expenses were high and they would be higher.

"I would have gone home," he explained to Essie,

"but the house is full. I have everything arranged there for this winter."

Essie crushed out her half smoked cigarette as she said, "When you leave a place, it soon closes in without you, like you had never been."

"Oh no!" Bob protested quickly. "Oh no!" He was surprised at his own vehemence. "My place is there all right, only my friends, Nat Willis and Mrs. Emerson, are staying with Little Dutch. I'd upset things if I went home now."

"I can put you in line for the biggest thing you'll ever even know about," Essie leaned across the table and for a second a stray beam of sunlight fell across her face.

Bob was both startled and shocked by what he saw. In her face were hundreds of tiny lines that the ordinary light ignored. They made her look old and hard, as if her very flesh were turning to granite. Her eyes looked larger and brighter than he had ever seen them and were like tiny fires, burning with a fierceness that reminded him of a gas well south of Calgary that burned with a glare you couldn't look at. It was fed from the very bowels of the earth itself.

It was only for a second; then she was just the Essie he had known ever since they went to school and she was telling him, "You will have to take an oath never to tell anyone, not even your wife, about the business, now, or at any other time."

"Why all the secrecy?" Bob asked, lighting a cigar.

"I can't tell you, but it is necessary," Essie said. "I can tell you though, the men connected with it know big business. I got to know them through Ben's people."

"Why would they take in small fish like me?" Bob asked.

"There's a reason," Essie said. "You'll know later."

"I don't like all this secrecy," Bob protested, "but I sure could do with some money. I'm restless; I can't seem to settle down."

"Then you'll meet me at the Meadow Lark when I tell you? I'll introduce you to some of the men you must know."

"Thanks very much," Bob had said with inward hesitation. He wondered at Essie's apparent relief and the abrupt way she prepared to leave. But when they were parting she asked, "How is Mr. Emerson?"

"He seems to be enjoying his work, but he needs Mrs. Emerson."

Essie looked at him without seeing him as she said, "If there were many people like them, the world would be good without trying."

As Bob thought about it, he went to the window and looked out. It was Saturday. He wanted to do something different but he couldn't think what would satisfy him. Nothing but Dutch would satisfy him and even she wouldn't quite. Not now. He began

to look for the newspaper. Perhaps there was a movie he could enjoy.

While he was looking there was a knock at his door. It was his landlady. "You're wanted on the telephone, Mr. Harrow. The lady called before, but she wouldn't leave a number or a message."

"Thank you, Mrs. Brown." Bob thought it must be Essie. She was the only one he knew who would call him and be mysterious about it.

He knew the voice, but could not place it at once. Then, "Of course I know you. It's the perfect dancer."

"Skater this time," Star Benson said with a laugh. "We're having a skating party. Will you be my partner?"

"Will I!" Bob knew at once there was nothing he would rather do. "What time shall I call for you?"

"I'm going to call for you," Star said. "I'll be there at six."

"Six!" Bob's voice was a question.

"We'll have dinner here before we go."

"That sounds great!" Bob said, "but—"

No buts," Star interrupted. "I'll be there."

Bob did not hide from himself that he was excited and pleased at the thought of spending the evening with Star. He was sure skating with her would be a poem in motion, and then their minds seemed to click so perfectly that whether they were talking or silent, they relaxed in a pleasant atmosphere of comradely understanding.

At once he began to think of what he would wear. Ever since he put off his uniform he had fussed over little details he had never thought of before. Socks, shirts, hats and especially ties had received his unsure attention. Ties were his speciality. He couldn't resist an attractive or even odd tie. He had dozens of them, picked up all over Europe and America. He decided to get them all out and choose the most suitable. He hadn't a proper skating outfit. A startling tie would be the best he could do to add to the merriment of the evening.

He put up a couple of lines that were for drying clothes. First, he went to his bureau drawers and put all the ties from there on the line. There were two dozen and ten. Then he went to his trunk. He had taken out four dozen and hung them up when the door opened and Dave Sheriff walked in. He stood for a full minute and stared before he asked, "What's the idea? A sale? Are you out of funds?"

"No," Bob said, considering the display. "I was trying to decide which one to wear."

"Going to Hollywood or to meet the President?" Dave continued.

Bob stood, his feet well apart, while he fingered his chin and considered the display. "I'm going to a skating party."

Dave grunted. "I might have known—a skirt."

Something in his tone stung Bob like a wasp.

He snapped, "Rot! It's just one of Mr. Emerson's students."

"Ya!" Dave jeered. "You weren't thinking of taking Mr. Emerson along, were you?"

Bob tried to be patient with Dave and he said, "You don't understand."

"No!" Dave agreed. "I ain't quite normal—but I don't need to be, to know that when a chap gets out upward of a hundred ties to pick one to suit a certain female, she ain't just anybody. She's special!"

"Nonsense! Don't be a fool!" Bob looked angrily at him.

But Dave went rambling on. "I knew a fellow once and boots was his specialty. His wife started out to count them and she set them around the walls of his bedroom. She had three rows right around and was starting on the fourth the last I heard." Bob did not comment, so Dave went on. "My specialty is shirts. If I had my shirts arranged, tail to neck in a row, I wouldn't be surprised if they'd reach the equator." Still Bob did not speak but began folding up the ties.

"Well, I guess I'll mosey along," Dave said. "You look hot and bothered. If there's anything I can do for you, let me know." He moved his hands jauntily and sauntered away.

"That fellow has become sadistic like the guards in the prison at Hong Kong," Bob told himself. "He likes to irritate people—impute wrong motives."

He mumbled his thoughts aloud, but he was honest enough to ask himself why Dave's implication should irritate him. His life had been so rooted in Dutch's that no serious thought of any other woman had crossed his mind. Such a thought was ridiculous. A man could enjoy the company of other women without such miserable thoughts. Besides, Star was only a kid.

But there was a flaw in the evening before it had begun. Bob was conscious of it as he had dinner with Star and her father and mother in their comfortable home. It was a home that was not ostentatious, but it spoke loudly of plenty.

Mr. Benson was a self-made man and proud of it. He was proud of the number of books he had, although he had not read any of them. He was proud of his wife, who was proud of the number of clubs in which she held important offices. He was proud of Star. It was evident that both father and mother expected Star to attain heights denied them, because of their limited advantages in their youth.

Mr. Benson was interested in the atomic bomb in a detached impersonal way. Mrs. Benson said they were getting a scientist, who had worked on the bomb, to speak to one group to which she belonged. She hoped she'd know more about it after she'd heard him.

Star, who had not been talking, interrupted, "Bob worked on the bomb."

"Yes, but I'm not a scientist," Bob said quickly. "My work was not important."

"This man we are getting is a real scientist," Mrs. Benson assured him. "He did terribly important work."

They left it at that and Bob had the impression that Star was only half listening. Some project in the back of her mind caused an inner excitement that was more important to her than what was going on around them.

When they were driving to the rink Bob laughed and said, "Now tell me what's happened? I can see there is something stirring. You appear to have a lamp lighted inside you."

"Do I really?" In Star's voice there was awe and a bit of wonder. "That's just the way I feel, Bob."

"Well, spill it," Bob said, trying to make the subject earthy.

"Let's skate first," Star begged. "Then we will be in the right mood. It's wonderful!"

"This sounds mysterious," Bob felt uncomfortable. It was Dave who had put a thought into his mind that he resented.

Soon, in the pleasure of skating, he forgot everything else. Star was a marvellous skater, and together they were so perfect, other skaters were soon stopping to watch them. Bob was human enough to like admiration, but before long he felt they were attracting more attention than their skating warranted. He

looked for the cause and saw it in the dark giant with whom Star was dancing the night he met her. She called the young man Blackie—and Blackie was following them around.

"That dark friend of yours appears interested in us," Bob said to Star. "Hadn't you better skate with him?"

"No, I won't skate with anyone but you," Star said firmly.

Bob was flattered, but he did not like the attention they were attracting. "He's a good skater."

"Yes, Blackie and I generally are the best on the rink," Star replied casually. "That's what's the matter with him. You're so much better."

At that moment, Blackie, who was skating alone, bumped into him and knocked him against the railing. He would have fallen if Star had not held on to him.

With a gruff, "Beg your pardon," Blackie skated on.

Bob's temper flared. He caught Star's arm and like the wind was after Blackie. He'd teach that young pup a lesson. In and out among the skaters they dodged, Blackie keeping just ahead until Bob suddenly felt Star holding him as they approached the entrance to the waiting room. He looked around; most skaters had left the ice and were a gallery on the sidelines watching.

Bob yielded to Star's firm pull on his arm and entered the waiting room. For a minute they were

alone and Star said, "It's my fault Bob. I promised a long time ago to skate with Blackie tonight, but I just had to talk to you."

"Did you explain to him?" Bob asked.

Star shrugged. "I tried to, but there are things you can't explain."

"I guess that's right," Bob agreed. Here was sex bobbing up its threatening head. He remembered Little Dutch saying once, that just to live was dangerous. It began to look like that. "What do you say if we get out of here?" he asked.

He felt at once Star's disappointment, but she agreed. When they were in her car, Bob said, "What about a Night Club? Have you ever been at the Meadow Lark?"

"Nol" Star's thoughts seemed to be elsewhere. "We could talk there?"

Bob had mentioned the Meadow Lark with the hope that he would see Essie Davis and remind her that he was still around. He had been expecting a call from her, but it had not come.

"I guess we could talk there all right," he said, "but I don't know much about night clubs."

"I've seen a few," Star acknowledged. "I've been in the main room at the Meadow Lark. I doubt whether—let's try it."

They had to wait some time for a cubicle in the most garish room Bob had ever seen. An anaemic kind of floor show was in progress. People were milling

through the halls and around the cubicles that lined two sides of the room. A young man was playing a piano and a girl was standing beside him with a violin. She looked frightened, as if she had strayed in from the country and did not know what to do.

"I'd like to go and tell that girl to go home," Bob said, when they were finally seated in one of the more secluded corners.

Star looked at her. "She wants something and she's willing to pay for it, just as I am."

Bob looked keenly at Star. "What do you want?" he asked.

"That's what I want to talk about," she said. "That's why I had to see you."

Bob looked around. "I guess we'd better order something. What'll you have?"

"Just a soft drink. I want my brain to be clear."

"This sounds serious." Bob tried to sound jovial, but there was an atmosphere around her that he could not penetrate. He was looking toward the main hall, through which a gay party in evening dress was passing. "There must be other rooms more select than this," he said. "I've seen—"

"It is said there are rooms here where men and women gamble all day and all night," Star said indifferently. "I've heard—"

Bob was smiling and bowing. Essie Davis, in full evening dress, accompanied by a gentleman, wearing a cape over a foreign uniform that gave him a very

distinguished appearance, were standing at the door. Essie had recognized him.

Her companion glanced at Bob, but his bold black eyes rested on Star. He said something to Essie.

Bob saw they were coming to speak to him and Star. Some instinct made him wish he had not brought Star there. Then Essie was introducing her companion, but instead of the unpronounceable foreign name Bob expected, she said, "This is General Horace Blakely, Mr. Harrow."

Bob introduced Star and it was at once evident that General Blakely admired youth and beauty. Almost immediately he was escorting them to one of the more select rooms upstairs, where everyone was gambling and drinking.

As soon as Essie had an opportunity to speak to Bob alone, she asked sharply, "Who is this girl?"

"She's one of Mr. Emerson's students," Bob explained.

"Mr. Emerson's!" Essie gasped. "This is no place for her." She smiled and raised her glass in answer to General Blakely, who had raised his glass and was looking at her from the bar. Essie looked at Bob, "That toast was to your success in the business General Blakely has for you. He is the man I wanted you to meet."

"Oh!" Bob said. He was conscious of a sense of disappointment.

"Get that girl out of here as soon as you can,"

Essie said. "Come tomorrow night at this time and I'll explain."

Bob was never very clear about what happened after that. He knew the cocktail was strong and he felt dizzy. He knew more liquor was served and he drank it. He knew that Star was not drinking and she finally insisted on taking him home. Essie seconded her efforts. He remembered Essie saying. "I'll sign for your bill. You can pay me tomorrow." Then he and Star were out in the car.

In the fresh air he began to revive. When Star stopped in front of his rooming house and got out with him, he said quickly. "I'm all right Star. It's late. Thanks a lot. You run on away home. I'm awfully sorry I made such a fool of myself."

"That cocktail was doped," Star said sternly. "There is something wrong about that place." She was at the door with him.

"You can't come in," Bob protested. "I'll—"

"It's all right," Star took the key out of his hand. "I telephoned Mr. Emerson and asked him to be here."

"Mr. Emerson!" Bob felt as if he must be dreaming.

"Yes!" Star was accompanying him upstairs. When they reached his room, there was Mr. Emerson. Bob's ties were arranged like a crazy quilt on the bed.

Bob looked around. "What does this all mean? I don't understand."

"I'm going to make coffee, then I'll explain," Star said. "Will you have some, Mr. Emerson?"

"I certainly will. I don't need it to sober me up, but to keep me awake at this time of night. Do you children know the hour?"

Bob looked at his watch. "Two o'clock! I am ashamed of myself Star. I'll go home with you: your parents—"

"Won't be home until tomorrow," Star said as she poured the coffee—so strong it was black. "Drink it as it is Bob. Will you have milk and sugar, Dr. Emerson?"

"I certainly will," Mr. Emerson laughed. "I wouldn't sleep for a week if I drank it that black."

Bob had the feeling that Mr. Emerson was trying to make light of his foolishness and while he appreciated it, he wished he wouldn't. He drank the coffee and soon he felt his head getting clearer. When he had finished a second cup, he looked at Star and asked, "Now will you tell me, what is this all about. I know I shouldn't take liquor. It goes to my head. Did I make a fool of myself?"

"There was dope in that liquor," Star said.

"Oh, no!" Bob laughed. "I've passed out before on the slightest provocation."

"Maybe," Star agreed, "but when I went to the powder room I heard Essie Davis and her friend talking. I just caught a word or two—they're up to some-

thing—they have to have your help Bob. I don't want you to go back."

Bob patted her shoulder. "That's all right. Essie is trying to get me into a business her friend manages. I'm going to see him tomorrow."

Star looked bothered. "I don't think it's simple like that," she said. "I didn't like that place. It gave me the creeps."

"You're thinking of going into business Bob?" Mr. Emerson asked.

"I don't know," Bob's shoulders sagged. "I don't seem able to settle down. I don't know what I want. Essie met this fellow Blakely through her husband's people. They have money. She says he does business in a big way."

"Why do they want you?" Star asked.

Bob grinned. "Do you think I wouldn't be any use in a big business?"

"I think you're wonderful anywhere," Star said with a burst of youthful admiration and emotion, that was so wholehearted it brought the color to Bob's face and wonder to Mr. Emerson's eyes. Star looked from one to the other and continued, "That was what I wanted to talk to you about. That was why I wanted Dr. Emerson. I've been thinking about what you said ever since I met you Bob. You said people should refuse to sow seed and bear children—so they would shock all the world into realizing the terrible danger in which civilization is. I've thought of it when I've

been trying to study. I think of it when I waken up in the night." She walked to the window. She stood with her back to it facing Bob and Mr. Emerson. "I've thought of the young people of Russia, of all the wonderful things we've heard they did; I've thought of the young people of Germany, of all the terrible things they did; I've thought of the young men and women of our country—of all they did and were ready to do." Into her bright, eager, youthful face came a terrible longing—and into her voice crept the tragedy of that longing as she added. "I grew up fed on great deeds—I trained to do great deeds—I dreamed great dreams and so did all my generation. We were going—" her voice fell flat. "Then everything ended. We were glad about peace because everyone said it was wonderful. We were going to have a new world. But all they talk about is getting back to normal. There doesn't seem to be anything big for us to do. Just making a living is not enough for the young people who grew up in a world where every newspaper had stories of deeds that made you catch your breath, made your eyes sting, made you long to risk your life to bring a better world for everybody. Bob is the very first person who has given me any hint of what we can do. His suggestion is negative, but it is better than nothing.

"I'm going to call a strike on life. I'm going to refuse to do all the ordinary things. I'm going to try and shock people into a realization that we must have a new world."

"How are you going to do it, Star?" Bob's voice was humble, because as she stood there she looked remote and beautiful like a pure flame of life that could rip and shatter or build a stairway to the stars.

She looked at Bob. "I expect you and Dr. Emerson to tell me. I'd like to stay with you Bob. I think we can see more clearly when we are together. I brought my grip. It is in my car."

"But you can't do that," Bob said gently. "I'm a married man. I—"

"But if we're to shock people into a realization we must get new values; wouldn't a bold straightforward attack on marriage startle them as much as anything?"

To Bob's surprise Mr. Emerson said, "She's right Bob. She's logical. You opened the door to that. You said you'd struck on life. You made no exceptions. You spoke as if you would discard everything of the past. Marriage and the family are important facts in our past."

"But I don't want to discard marriage," Bob said. "I'm happy in my marriage. I love my wife."

"Then in this new world we are trying to build you wish to keep some of the old world, but what?" Mr. Emerson asked.

"That's what I wish to know," Star interrupted impulsively. "How can we tell what to keep and what to throw overboard? What is the measuring rod? I'm

ready to break every rule I've been taught if necessary. I'm ready—"

"You young people are an undisciplined bunch," Mr. Emerson laughed. "Have you no respect for what you've been taught?"

"How can we have when everyone says we must build a new world or be destroyed?"

"That's a sensible question," Mr. Emerson had begun to walk excitedly up and down the room.

"All authority seems to have gone out of the world," Bob grumbled.

Mr. Emerson stopped, stood a minute, a great light came into his face. He banged his fist on the table. "We older people are so conscious of our failures that we are afraid of the job ahead. We are trying to shove it off on youth. All over we are saying, 'Our hope is in youth. We must depend on youth.'"

"That's it!" Star nodded emphatically. "You make us feel we must build a new world and then when we try to build—"

"We say you are undisciplined," Mr. Emerson smiled. "You are right Star. How can you know the eternal principles that have been proven true in all ages if we do not tell you? If we do not make you believe?"

"Oh, I want something, not just talk," Star clasped her hands and raised her eyes. "I have so much life in me. I have dreams. I don't want to be like the people at that night club, drinking and gambling their

life away and finding nothing. I want something to do that is as big as my dreams. Bob, Mr. Emerson, can't you show me the way?" She held out her hands toward them beseeching. "I'm not afraid of anything. I'll do anything. I'm not afraid of work. I'm not afraid of being different. I'm not afraid of being poor."

Tears came to Bob's eyes. "I'm a false alarm, Star," he said apologetically. "I have nothing, as you have said, but the negative suggestion, and you have so much to offer, like youth all over the world. You are offering yourselves and there are no takers."

They were startled by a strange sound, half a laugh or a shout or a prayer. It was Mr. Emerson. He was standing, his face shining with a new happiness that was like a light in the room. "Bob," he said, and his voice was rich and full. "Bob, I've found it. Star has brought me the answer. I've found why God has given us the secret of the atomic bomb now. Just now, after all these millions of years, he has chosen us as the custodians of this marvellous secret. Bob, at last I know why. Day and night I've prayed for an answer. I've begged, 'God, tell me why we have been given this knowledge,' and Star, you have made it clear to me. That is the first big thing you have done, my dear."

"I don't understand. What have I done?" Star asked wonderingly.

"Through you, I can see idealism that is waiting,

ready, eager, and determined to be used. It is the finest essence of energy and never has there been such an outpouring. Bob, it will wreck or save civilization. Bob, we must use it because it will build either a heaven or a hell. God had faith in us. He saw our ideals, our dreams, the outpouring of desire in youth, in middle age and in old age, to give everything to make a world where men will no longer slaughter each other. God saw that and he said, 'We have enough. I can trust men with the greatest revelation ever made to humanity.' "

"But there are still millions who want power and possessions, millions who want to get and not give, millions ready to fight again," Bob said dully. "Millions are eager to live in the same old way."

"That's all right." Mr. Emerson, who was walking back and forth, scarcely seeming to touch the floor, said confidently. "We all want something. We're made that way. But those who have had the vision of a better world want something different. That's the point. We want something different, Bob. God saw we wanted it badly enough to pay the price and so He gave us the secret. He said, this earth on which you live is just a mass of force. If you go on as you are going you will destroy it. But it could be made a marvellous place in which to live if you knew how to live. So that's it Star. We've either got to learn how to live or civilization has failed. It is finished. Is that a big enough job for you?"

"But how can we find out the way to live?" Star was standing beside him, her whole body eagerly reaching out with the hope of one who has seen a faint light.

"I don't know," he said, "but let us pray!" He prayed. "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil, For thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory. Amen."

Star joined him when he said, "For thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory. Amen."

When they had finished they looked at each other like people who have been dazzled by a great light. Star said, "I must think about this. It is so big and I'm so small. May I take you home, Mr. Emerson?"

Mr. Emerson looked keenly at her. "You wish to go home Star?"

"Yes," she said unhesitatingly. "This is a new thought to me—why the secret of the bomb was given to us? I want to think about it. God must have wanted us to use what knowledge we have—not to throw it aside—nor to begin from the bottom."

"That's my idea," Mr. Emerson agreed simply. "God said to himself, you have enough good tools now—our thoughts are our tools—I'm just opening

the door into a new world, where dreams can come true."

"I must take you both home," Bob said after a pause.

When they were leaving Star at her home, Mr. Emerson said, "This has been a wonderful night, Star."

"Yes, Sir, a wonderful night," Star agreed.

Bob made no comment. He felt disappointed. These two had gone back to the same old teaching—dressed up a bit differently—live better lives and all will be well. "It isn't well," Bob thought. "It looks to me like God gave us that secret, not because he trusted us, but so we can finish the whole thing up. Blow the earth and everyone on it to smithereens. Seems like it might be a good idea too."

## ❧ VIII ❧

Bob and Star took Mr. Emerson to Clinton College. Then Bob accompanied Star to her home. When he left her he walked until daylight. He felt as if he were on a high cliff with a deep crevasse on one side, while on the other was a level plain that was mined. One false step would destroy both him and the plain. He walked fast, he walked slowly, he ran three blocks. He sat down in a small park and tried to think, but he could not escape a sense of imminent danger.

"I guess I'm not normal!" he said the words aloud as the first faint cold streaks of dawn shot above the eastern horizon. "I'm maybe getting mental." He thought of the buildings he had seen—institutions for such cases. A deep-down revolt rose

within him. An assurance of the integrity of his mind suddenly possessed him. He was not only normal, he was more normal than most people. He stood up and squared his shoulders as if defying the universe. But nothing answered. Nothing moved. Time and circumstance were ignoring him. But he was being carried along to some unknown goal like a leaf in a spring freshet. Then it was that Bob Harrow knew the great loneliness. It swept over him like a mighty wave that left him stranded in nothingness.

All around him the city lay asleep, a gigantic mass of human energy, each separate human being with strange dreams of its own, but why? Over each, from the newest born baby to the oldest citizen, whether in castle or slum, lay the shade of death. There was no influence on earth that could divert the writing finger. But who was writing and why?

Bob had asked that question before, but not with the urgency that now possessed him. Could it be that Mr. Emerson was right? Had God, if there were a God, deliberately given the secret of the atomic bomb to humanity because for the first time people could be trusted to use that knowledge to build and not to destroy? But build what? How?"

Bob had been fumbling in the files of his subconscious mind for something he knew was there, but could not name. Suddenly it came to him, something Lincoln had said about turning to God

because he had nowhere else to go. It did seem as if a person could get lost in the world of the mind, completely lost, like a person off the trail, in a blizzard on the prairie.

But the fellow lost in the blizzard was looking for a place called home. He knew it was there waiting for him—shelter and food. The man lost mentally had no home—no resting place. For the first time in his life Bob acknowledged to himself that he was not strong enough to stand alone. He began to walk back to his room. He knew what he was going to do. He was going back to Dutch and the farm. Not that he was satisfied with the situation there, but it was all he had. He must have some place to start from. He would try to find some common ground on which to stand with Dutch.

He was like a surveyor who drives in a stake and runs a line from there. Revolutions have been caused by that simple act. But he must put down his stake. He thought of the philosophers who staked their theories to the assumption that the Universe began with particles whirling through space. Now the atomic bomb proved the Universe did not begin with particles whirling through space. It began with energy. The philosophers would have to change their stake, but they would have to assume energy unless they could tell what made energy.

Bob went into a Chinese restaurant for a cup

of coffee and a cigarette. There he made his plan. He would take his final lectures with the University and close his account with them that very day. He would pack his clothes and books and send all but his overnight bag to the station in the evening. Then he would keep his appointment to meet Essie Davis at the Meadow Lark. He owed her some money and he would explain to her that he had decided to return to the farm for the present. Later, if he felt differently he might go into business.

So at eleven o'clock that night he was again in the Meadow Lark night club. He asked one of the waiters to tell Essie he was there, but the fellow said she hadn't come yet. Bob sat down in the room on the main floor, but almost immediately another man came and told him Essie wished to see him.

Bob followed the man up the stairs, up a second stairs, down a hall and around a corner to a plainly furnished room at the back of the building. Essie was lying on a couch. It was evident she was under the influence of liquor or a drug. "Sit down! We'll talk." She began to giggle. "Talk! Talk big!"

She had been grinning but suddenly her expression changed. She glowered. "You'll swear not to tell anyone—you'll swear it and you'll keep your oath or—" she lay back and giggled. She played with a string of pearls around her neck. "I'm giving you this chance—you—because your mother

put me out and you kept me waiting—didn't come. Coals of fire—" she laughed shrilly.

"I didn't get your letter that time, Essie," Bob said. "I've always been sorry about that. But I came tonight to tell you I'm not going into business now. I'm—"

"But you can't back out now," Essie sat up. "Oh no, you can't back out now. I told—"

They were interrupted by the entrance of Horace Blakely. He was wearing an ordinary business suit and appeared more foreign than he had in the uniform. He looked sharply at Essie and frowned. He smiled in a forced way at Bob. "I'll be free in a few minutes to discuss the business with you, Mr. Harrow."

"I'm sorry to have given you this trouble," Bob said quickly. "I came to tell you that I've decided to go home. I'm not going into business just yet."

Horace Blakely's expression changed, became very black and threatening. "You understand I've been depending on you?"

"No, I didn't understand that exactly," Bob said. "I thought you were going to give me an opportunity, but—"

"Excuse me! We'll discuss that later." General Blakely turned toward the door. "Come with me for a minute, Essie." It was a command.

Essie staggered to her feet and followed him out.

Bob understood now what Star meant. This

place gave him an unpleasant feeling. He was glad he had resolved to have nothing to do with Blakely. That man was not above board. There was something mysterious about him. He wondered what Essie really thought of the General. He would ask her.

Essie returned carrying a small tray with two glasses of what looked like wine. One glass had a spoon in it.

"I can't take liquor," Bob said. "You saw the other night how it goes to my head."

Essie laughed—her voice was shrill. "This isn't liquor. It's just a soft drink—ginger ale colored." She laughed nervously.

Bob accepted the glass, held toward him. At that moment someone in the hall groaned and there was a scuffle outside the door.

Essie put down the tray and ran out, closing the door after her.

Some strange suspicion that Bob could not have explained at the moment, made him take Essie's glass and put his where her's had been with the spoon in it. He had barely made the exchange when Essie returned. Her face was red and she was evidently agitated as she tried to say lightly. "One of the waiters had a fit or something."

She stirred the contents of her glass and drank it in two long swallows. "Drink yours," she said abruptly. "You won't have time after the General comes. He will get right down to business."

"But I told you I'm not going into this business," Bob said.

"Oh, but you'll have to." Essie's face was working strangely. Her eyes looked wildly excited. She began to whisper mysteriously. "You'll have to. General needs all you know about the bomb. He'll pay you for it, but you'll have to tell him. He's a scientist you know. We've lots of scientists, but you know something we need."

Bob felt his body stiffen. "Need for what?" he asked.

Essie looked around suspiciously. Then she went close to him and whispered. "Need to know how to make the atomic bomb. That's the General's business. He's got it nearly all. When you tell him what you know, we'll have it. We'll be rulers of the world." Her voice had risen, she was almost shouting. "We'll have wealth, power, coals of fire on your head I'm pouring."

"You're crazy," Bob said. "I don't know anything important about the bomb and I'm not going to tell what I do know."

"But you'll have to," Essie's eyes were large and starey. "You see you drank that, it makes you tell the truth. You can't help yourself. You just do."

Bob caught her by the shoulder and shook her. He made her face him. "What are you talking about?"

"About the bomb. You know, the atomic bomb.

The General almost has the secret. He just needs what you know and what two others—”

Bob’s hands closed on her shoulders until she winced and cried. “Let me alone. You said you’d come into the business. I told them you would. We need you right now. Some of the people are getting suspicious. We had to give you this stuff to make you tell all you know. You’ll tell all right when the General—”

Bob shrank back with a look and a feeling of horror. He had read about the gas the Germans used that made people tell the truth. These people, in our own country, were using it. His impulse had been right. Essie had taken it and was telling him the truth. He looked wildly around. People who would do that would do anything.

Essie was babbling on. “You do what the General tells you and you’ll be all right.” She whispered, “but you must do what he tells you. People who wouldn’t have disappeared, Bob—things have happened to them. I told him you would. When he finds out how to make the bomb we’ll all have wealth and power, we’ll own the world.”

“You little fool,” Bob muttered. “Get me out of this and you’re coming with me.”

“No, we can’t.” Essie drew back. There was no doubt about her fear. “We can’t now, Bob. We’ve got to go on.”

"But we're not going on." Bob caught her arm and dragged her to the door.

She grabbed the doorknob. Terror gave her strength. "They'd kill us, Bob. We can't get away now."

"We'll take a chance," Bob tried to loosen her hold on the door.

"No, we won't," her self-control had returned. She stood straight, her eyes flashed. "I see now what you did. You changed those glasses. I've been telling the truth." She laughed wildly. "You've always been too clever for me, Bob Harrow, but I love you. Maybe that's why. You've always belonged in another bracket. Now we're together and we're going to stay together."

"Don't be a fool," Bob stormed. "If you loved me you'd get me out of here."

"Not my kind of love," Essie laughed. "It's a cheap kind. I'd rather see you dead than let you go back to Dutch."

Bob remembered that Dutch had said Essie Davis was the only girl she had ever been jealous of. He stepped back. He folded his arms across his chest. "I guess I've never really known you, Essie. Surely you know you are betraying your country!"

"What has my country done for me?" Essie protested. Suddenly she stiffened and listened to heavy footsteps that had been going up and down

the hall in front of the door. "There's someone talking to the guard," she said tensely, "Listen!"

Clearly into the room came the voice of Mr. Emerson, "But I must see Bob Harrow. I've had word from his wife. It's important."

"Mr. Emerson!" Bob and Essie said the name together.

"My God, how did he get here?" Essie gasped.

"I don't know," Bob was looking at Essie's face that had turned white and then almost a green. Her eyes were like coals of black fire.

"We must get him out, Bob," Essie was breathing fast. "He made my mother happy. I can't let them do anything to him." She ran to a drawer and took out a small revolver. She now looked alert and capable. She held it up. "There is a guard in this hall, a guard in the lower hall and a guard just outside the back door. We'll have to get past them without letting them make any noise. When you get to the back lane, don't stay with Mr. Emerson. Get home as fast as you can. I'll tell him to do the same."

They could hear the voices outside the door—Mr. Emerson's persistent, the guard's getting a little rough.

Essie rushed to a cupboard and took out a bottle. "This guard can't resist a drink." She poured some liquor into a glass, then opened the door. In a pleasant welcoming voice she said, "Come in, Mr.

Emerson. I didn't expect you, but you're always welcome."

To the guard's muttered, "I've no orders—" she said, "I'll attend to him." Then to the guard, "I kept a drink for you." She handed him the glass.

"I did have a job finding you," Mr. Emerson shook her hand. "You might almost think this was a detention camp, they questioned me so. I came with a message to you, Bob. Dutch tried to get you."

"You can tell him later," Essie interrupted. "You and Bob must get out of here, Mr. Emerson. Bob is in danger. You will be too if you stay. Don't ask questions, just do as you are told." She turned to Bob. "The other two guards will be tougher. We've got to get past them without making any noise." She looked at the weapon in her hand. "It won't make any noise." She held it down at her side and opened the door. She beckoned for them to follow her. They did, down the hall, past the guard who was leaning against the wall, apparently asleep, toward the back stairs that were bare and creaked. They crept down as quietly as they could and reached the lower hall without seeing anyone. That hall was carpeted and they walked with more assurance. They had almost reached the stairs to the main floor when a big dog with a booming angry voice appeared and barked threateningly.

Without any hesitation Essie put the gun to his head and he dropped. She dashed down the

stairs, Bob close behind and Mr. Emerson following. In the lower hall just inside the outer door a guard stood, a club in his hand. "What's going on here?" he demanded and he raised a whistle to his lips. But Bob was too quick for him. He knocked it out of his hand and gave the fellow a blow that felled him.

Essie was soon struggling with the door that was locked. Bob tried it, but it was too strong. They heard a whine. Evidently the dog had been stunned and was coming to. A terrible yelp tore the air and they heard footsteps hurrying along the upper hall.

"Is there no other door?" Bob asked. "Couldn't we make a dash through the front?"

"Doors between are locked," Essie gasped.

"Is this the key?" Mr. Emerson had stopped to examine the man Bob had knocked out and he had his keys.

Essie grabbed them and just as another howl tore through the building they emerged into a garage at the back that was dimly lighted from the lane, as the garage doors were open. Mr. Emerson who was behind, took the key from the inside of the house door, stepped out, closed the door and locked it, leaving the key on the outside.

Essie, who had rushed out into the lane stepped back. "Here comes a car. We'll have to wait."

"Stand well back," Mr. Emerson seemed to have control of the situation. He pushed Essie and Bob behind him as if for their protection.

To their terror, the car slowed as it approached the garage. It swung out. It was going to enter.

"It's the General!" Essie muttered, as the light was swinging toward them. She added, "We're lost."

Mr. Emerson reached back. "Give me that gun."

Essie put it into his hand. There was no sound except the tinkle of glass in the windshield of the approaching car. Then, there was the tinkle of more glass and one headlight in the car went out. There was another tinkle of splintered glass and the other light went out. There was the murmur of voices. They heard the car start. They heard it roar down the lane.

"We'd better get out of here. He'll be back any minute." Mr. Emerson hurried into the lane, but backed up. "We'll have to wait. There's another car coming." At that moment a bar of light from a car on the next street lighted up the garage.

Bob saw Mr. Emerson's face bright with the excitement of battle. Essie was white as paper, her eyes glowing like fires. "You sure can handle a gun," Bob mumbled.

Essie looked up into Mr. Emerson's face. "I want to be buried at Harrow beside my mother, Mr. Emerson."

Mr. Emerson laughed. "Don't talk about being buried. You're just beginning to live."

The car in the lane was passing.

"Why did you do this, Essie?" Mr. Emerson asked. "Why did you bother about me?"

Essie's face changed. It became gentle and childlike. "You made my mother happy. I'll never forget that. Now, get away."

"You're coming with us," Bob growled. "You're coming with us." He caught her arm.

"Get away as fast as you can. Don't stay together. Keep out of the way of cars and trucks," Essie was whispering. Another car was passing. Essie shook off Bob's hand. "I'm going this way," she said. Her face had assumed its impish, hard look. "We must not be seen together. I'll go this way." She ran down the lane to the left keeping in the shadows.

"Come!" Mr. Emerson shoved the gun into his overcoat pocket. He led the way into the lane. They heard voices. "We'd better get to the street." All along the lane were fenced-in gardens. Mr. Emerson began tugging at a low gate but it resisted. To Bob's astonishment he vaulted the fence and ran toward the front street.

Bob followed, marvelling at the agility of the older man. When they got past the house and through the front garden they found the front gate resisting them. Again Bob was astonished to see Mr. Emerson vault over the fence, his coattails flying as if surprised at the unusual position they found

themselves in. He joined him on the sidewalk. There was no one to be seen on the street.

"We'd better separate," Mr. Emerson said.

"Had you a message from Dutch?" Bob asked anxiously.

"She's all right," Mr. Emerson said. "I'll explain later. It was Star made me come to the Meadow Lark tonight. She said there was mischief afoot." He motioned toward a bus that was coming. "You take that one. I'll get one up here. I'll call you in the morning."

Bob looked at him in surprise. He had his hat at a jaunty angle on the side of his head. He had a twig in the corner of his mouth that might have been a cigar. He was strutting as Bob had seen a leader of a gang of outlaws strut in a wild west show. He wondered if Mr. Emerson was like a small boy, acting a part or had the gun he still held, hidden in his pocket, brought back the memory of some experience in his earlier life.

In a kind of daze Bob climbed into the bus. He did not notice where it was going until it stopped and the conductor said, "We don't go any further." Bob thought, "Mustn't act queer." So he got out. There was a small waiting room but no houses near. He went in. He sat down, but he could not sit still. He got up and went outside. Something should be done and done at once. That big business Essie talked about was making the atomic bomb. They

had investigated when she had told them he had worked on the bomb. They wanted the information he had. They had resolved to make him talk. Doubtless they did not know that Essie had talked too much. He felt his anger rising. Here in our own country was a band of international crooks, trying to steal the secret that would make them masters of the world. It was too terrible to think about. He should go to the police, but the local police were not enough. This was a matter for the government at Washington.

When a bus came Bob returned to the centre of the city. He telephoned Mr. Emerson who answered at once. All Bob said was, "Meet me at the airport at 9 o'clock. Plane leaves for Washington."

"I'll be there," Mr. Emerson replied.

Bob went home but not to sleep. A strange excitement like warm, rich blood was flowing through him. He was asking himself, "What do I know about even my closest friends? What do I know about anything?"

He thought he knew Dutch, but he didn't. There were deeply buried strains in her that made her a stranger. He thought he knew Essie, but he didn't. He didn't even know Star, young and ignorant of the world as she was. Then there was Mr. Emerson, handling a gun with an accuracy any bandit might envy and vaulting over fences with an agility that bespoke practice. And there was himself.

What like was he? What would satisfy him? What was he looking for? What was he capable of doing to gain his end?

Bob and Mr. Emerson did not talk on the plane. Bob dozed. He dreamed that Star, followed by thousands of young people like herself was looking for him. All were singing a song about 'earning a living is not enough, our dreams have soared too high.' They were demanding that Bob show them the way to that new world that had been promised them. He was trying to hide from them behind a fence when Mr. Emerson came vaulting over. The wind caught under his flying coattails and carried him up into the air. Bob tried to catch his feet to pull him back, but the minister turned and shot him with a jaunty flip of his gun.

Bob wakened and Mr. Emerson was sitting motionless trying to see out the window, so he dozed again. This time he dreamed that Essie, dressed in velvet and ermine and driving a magnificent car was beckoning him. But on the other side of the street in a little park, Dutch was struggling with a small child who was too much for her. She was looking anxiously toward him, but asking nothing. Bob felt himself going toward Essie but he shouted, "I don't want to go."

Mr. Emerson was shaking him. He had a morning paper. He was pointing to a heading,

“Woman killed in street accident.” In the story, that was from Minneapolis, it said there was no means to identify the body. She was not more than twenty-four, five foot six, stylishly dressed in tailored brown hat and dress and coat and shoes. She had red hair and a mole behind her left ear.

Bob looked up. His eyes met Mr. Emerson's. He began to tremble. “Essie had a mole behind her left ear,” he said.

## IX

BOB HARROW rode with Mr. Emerson in a car provided by the Stainer Funeral Parlors in Standhope. In the car following was the body of Essie Davis. They were going to bury her at Harrow, beside her mother. Mr. Emerson had made the arrangements and he and Bob had guaranteed all the costs.

When the newspapers from coast to coast carried the story of the plot that had been unearthed at the Meadow Lark night club, Bob Harrow, much against his will, had figured as the hero, with Mr. Emerson a close second. Essie Davis would have appeared as a villain if Bob had not been able to get the sympathy of a good reporter, who built up a powerful human interest story around her, so that

her weakness was swallowed up in her magnificent sacrifice.

Bob was thinking of all this as they rolled along the highway, the prairie on every side looking like a recently deserted battlefield. It was spring and the struggle of the seasons gave the whole countryside a dishevelled beaten look to which heavy rains had added a final touch of despondency. Bob found himself asking, "How do we know spring will conquer? Winter may win and draw us back into her icy grip."

He did not know he had spoken until Mr. Emerson said, "I beg your pardon. What did you say?"

"I said, how do we know spring will conquer. Looks right now as if winter may win."

"It does," Mr. Emerson agreed. In the air were flakes of snow that kept their feet dry on fence posts, and branches of trees, above the sloughs and ponds and slush. Mr. Emerson looked at Bob. "You don't know spring will win, but I do."

"How do you know?" Bob asked.

"Because I have the promise that while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

"But that holds good only so long as the earth remains," Bob said. "When we blow it up, what then?"

"We'll remain," Mr. Emerson said. "Of that I have no doubt either, because God's command is to take life everlasting."

"Command?" Bob said. "What do you mean?"

"I guess it means what it says."

"Commands us to take life everlasting?"

"That's it!"

"You think the Bible is inspired, Mr. Emerson?"

"I do!"

"There are other inspired books."

"Certainly, there are—many."

They were approaching the cemetery. "Look!" Bob's voice was excited. "Look at the crowd. I was afraid there wouldn't be anyone but ourselves. Nat has gone to a conference of doctors and Dad is sick and Dutch couldn't come alone, and of course Essie's father is drunk. That is his way of meeting every crisis."

"And mother is with Mrs. Hawkins and Mr. Hawkins thinks that in view of the fact that he is going to be secretary for Clinton College, it would be wiser for him not to have anything to do with this case, that has a shady side," Mr. Emerson added.

"Hawkins doesn't know that you recommended him for Clinton, does he?" Bob asked.

Mr. Emerson smiled. "No, he thinks he has put one over on me in some way. He is asking everyone to keep it a profound secret so that it won't hurt me."

They had reached the cemetery—a well-kept plot on a gentle hill overlooking a long valley. It was fenced and had trees planted around it and shrubs here and there. Weathered monuments bore the names of early pioneers and the number of graves around some of these bore testimony to the fact that Harrow was getting on in years. It was no longer a pioneer settlement.

Mr. Emerson and Bob led the way to the newly dug grave. There was only Essie's mother in the plot, because the Davis family were transients. They had lived a few years at Harrow, then moved away and later returned. They never put down deep roots, and so when they died they were buried just where they happened to meet the reaper, so that even their graves bore testimony to the fact that they were drifters.

Essie and her mother, side by side in the earth, would in their death give a sense of permanence they had never given anywhere in life. Mr. Emerson touched this point when he departed from the regular service and said to the little gathering, "Essie always wanted to be like others, but she couldn't manage it. Things were too much for her and it made her bitter. But friends, in judging her I'll never forget that she gave her life for me, and why? She didn't know me well. It was because I had visited her mother regularly in her last illness. I had refused to throw stones. Yes, Essie could sink

to the depths but she could reach the heights. Thank God she died on the mountain top."

Mr. Emerson paused and a breeze whispered through the trees and the sun—looking a bit watery and subdued, but still the sun—broke through the clouds and cast a bright glow over the faces of Essie's neighbors, the only friends she had, as Mr. Emerson added, "She wished to be buried here. Some way, I feel today she is one of you as never before."

"Amen!" rose from the little group, like an anthem, a promise, a prayer.



“BOB, you must get home at once. Dutch is alone and the water in the creek is so high we’re afraid it’s going to wash out the bridge.”

Bob’s mother met him and Mr. Emerson at the door, when they reached Harrow, after Essie Davis’ funeral. “Your father and I would have gone over if he had been able. You can take the car.”

“I’ll go at once.” Bob started for the garage.

“Where is mother?” Mr. Emerson asked.

“She is helping Mrs. Hawkins pack, but she’ll go to Dutch as soon as Dutch needs a nurse. Here are the keys Bob.”

As Bob returned for the keys he mumbled, “It seems with all the people I left, somebody might have stayed with Dutch.”

"It's your job," his mother said tartly.

Bob grinned. Strange how good his mother's snappy answer made him feel. It was like old times. She was not trying to jolly him along. She was letting him have it from the shoulder in her natural way.

He was soon on the highway. It was wet and in places the water was running over the road in little streams. As he approached the gully through which the stream from across the wild land flowed, he gazed in amazement. It was like a mighty river. He was driving through water now. He stopped with the front wheels of the car on the bridge that was creaking and swaying. He hesitated, but only for a second. He had to get across that bridge. If he didn't it would mean a forty mile detour and part of the way the roads were bad and there were culverts and bridges that might be gone. He stepped on the gas.

Before he reached the middle of the bridge he heard a terrible cracking and splintering behind him. He thought his car was turning, but in a second he realized that the end of the bridge he had just come over had torn loose. It was swinging out into the stream. He peered ahead. He was too late. The whole centre span of the bridge was free. It was being carried down stream and he, sitting helplessly in his car, was on it.

It is strange, how small, apparently unimportant facts of nature can sway human destiny. Bob was being carried down stream backwards, which seemed the

final indignity. He did not reason it out, he just felt it. Added to that was the fact that he was at the mercy of the little creek, the stream that had not rated even a name of its own as it meandered through the still wild land. If he had been fighting some mighty river, like the Mississippi, he could have felt heroic, but this thing was like being drowned in a bathtub.

But, regardless of all this, the bridge floated on, now lurching to the right and now to the left, his car slipping this way and that. He could not swim since his arm had been hurt, in the war. There was no use his trying that. His only hope was that someone might see him and rescue him. But there were few people abroad and there were few homes in the valley anywhere near the bed of the stream. However, he kept a keen lookout.

For fully half an hour he did not think. He merely fumed inwardly. He cursed in good strong oaths that did not change anything, but gave him some relief. Then he began to think of Dutch. He was quite sure Nat would not have left her unless he was confident she would be all right, but it was near the time for the birth of their child. His mother had appeared worried, but then his mother was one who believed in everything being, as she expressed it, "done decently and in order."

Bob had talked to Dutch on the telephone from Washington and later from Standhope—she had seemed eager to see him, but cheerful and unworried.

She had told him she had persuaded Nat to go to the meeting of doctors, when she knew he was coming home. Now, no telling when he would get home, if ever.

His bridge raft floated on, the creek gaining depth and width and confidence. He had not seen a living creature moving, not even a bird. He climbed on top of the car so he could be seen. But the daylight was wearing thin and still nothing was to be seen moving, but water. All around was a scene of desolation. Strangely enough in the air there was the rich body odor of the earth and a breeze with the merry snappy lilt of spring in it. It reached his senses, but not his spirits.

Bob could not remember that ever in his life had he felt so completely useless and wretched. He had gone to college and he had come back as empty as he went. As far as he could see he had gained nothing and given nothing. There had been a lot of talk in pulpits, on platforms, in magazines and newspapers during the winter, but not one new constructive idea about the use of the atomic bomb had emerged.

In his own case, his belief that people must change in their way of thinking, or civilization was lost, had not altered. But so far as he could see things were not changing. There were no leaders. People were talking in the same old way. But Bob's thoughts kept returning to Essie Davis. She had a

contempt for religion. She had been willing to sell her country. She claimed she loved him. He had half suspected it, but that love had not prevented her trying to drag him down with her. Then to save a man she scarcely knew she had risked and lost her life. "It's too much for me," he said aloud. "I give up." He meant it.

He had scarcely slept for two nights. He felt tired. He relaxed. Suddenly a feeling of the uselessness of it all swept over him. Why struggle any more? This was an ignominious way to go out, but what did it matter. Essie had struggled to get even with life that she felt had cheated her. Life had beaten her or had it? Bob sat straighter for a minute or two. He didn't know. Maybe it hadn't.

His mind went travelling idly on. Mr. Emerson and Star thought they could stir the world to the tremendous responsibility now given to men. But was the world too tired, too disillusioned? He thought it was. He was anyway. Maybe people were right. Maybe he was not normal. He didn't care any more. Let things take their course like this creek that had become a mighty stream. Let people break their hearts—he was going to drift. He sagged down and half dozed. After a long time he stirred uncomfortably. He was thinking of Dutch alone in their little farm home. It was beginning to rain. There was sleet in the rain. If the baby came—but he didn't want the baby. It wasn't fair! He was still on top

of the car, stiff with the cold. He felt a jerk and his world began to slide. He was pitched into the icy water, the car after him. One side of his raft had run up on a rock.

Bob floundered and sputtered and struggled. How he did it he never knew, but he finally reached the shore. Not far away he saw a faint light. He staggered toward it. It was a small farm house, just a shack. It was new and Bob did not know it. The occupants were foreigners and did not speak English. By signs, after much difficulty, he made them understand what had happened. By signs they invited him to stay for the night. Even as they indicated that they would give him a blanket on the floor, Bob had the feeling that some minor tragedy was worrying them. He was fairly good at making himself understood by signs and he asked them what was the matter.

The young man motioned toward his wife who had been crying and who now turned her back; with gestures and grunts and by getting an egg cup, he explained that the flood had carried away their hen house and the hens. His wife was expecting a baby and she had been counting on the eggs to get the baby clothes.

Little Dutch's possible need swept back into Bob's numbed mind. He turned to the woman and explained about Dutch. To his surprise she understood almost at once and more quickly than it can

be told, he was supplied with dry overalls and a blanket to wrap around him. They had no car but they had a truck, and in a remarkably short time Bob was on his way home in that truck.

When they reached Bob's house, the owner of the truck, who said his name was Ivor, indicated that he would wait until Bob found out how things were.

Bob entered his home and called, expecting Dutch to run to meet him, but there was no answer and no sound. He called again and hurried into the bedroom.

Dutch was sitting on the edge of the bed. Her hair was dishevelled and perspiration stood out over her face that was twisting in pain. "I'm so glad you got here," she gasped. "The baby is coming. You must—"

"My God!" Bob staggered back. "Where is Mrs. Emerson? Where is mother? Where is—"

"Mr. and Mrs. Emerson are stuck on the north road at the culvert beside Cooneys. Your mother has no way of getting here. You must—"

Bob dashed out, thankful beyond words for the truck. He directed his new friend where to go for Mr. and Mrs. Emerson. He heard the truck rattle away. He returned to the kitchen and shut the door. He stood a second or two. He had always felt inadequate where there was sickness. He was afraid of it—and at the thought of a baby coming he was

paralyzed with fear. He wanted to run away. He could not bear to see Little Dutch suffer as he was afraid she might. Then he squared his shoulders and went in.

Little Dutch had a small booklet in her hand. She was walking around. Without any greeting she handed it to him and said, "Read that Bob as quickly as you can."

"Read it?" Bob felt dazed.

"Yes. It was written by a doctor for country women who are not able to have a doctor or nurse at childbirth. It will tell you what to do."

"Tell me what to do," Bob repeated parrot-like. A feeling of terror stunned him.

"Read it!" Little Dutch said firmly.

"But I couldn't, Dutch—"

"You'll have to help me if Mrs. Emerson doesn't get here," Dutch said practically. "Lots of country women—" a terrible pain wrenched her body. Involuntarily she cried out.

"What is it? Can I—" Bob ran to her.

"Read that!" Dutch commanded. She seemed detached, absorbed in a drama in which she needed his help, but in which he had no vital part. "Read that!" she said again and she went back to bed.

At first Bob could not concentrate. Finally he went into the living room and forced himself to read. He shrank from the things that had to be

done—and then Dutch cried out. “Bob—oh, Bob, help me.”

He went into the bedroom. She was lying on the bed. “Hold my hands,” she said. She caught his hands and he had to brace himself against the bedstead. Her struggle was terrible—so terrible that Bob bit his lips until the blood came, struggling not to cry out with her. After awhile she lay back exhausted.

Bob was frightened. She looked like death. He brought her a drink. He took up the instructions and read them again. He was conscious of the snow and sleet beating on the windows. He heard the wind soughing around the eaves. He felt as if he were the only man on earth. He thought he and Dutch must feel as Adam and Eve felt when their first child was born. Surely Mrs. Emerson would come soon.

Suddenly a scream tore through the house. Bob dashed to Dutch who was struggling in the last terrible pains of childbirth unsoftened by kindly drugs or knowing voices to tell her she was doing well. Colonel the dog, who had been asleep in the kitchen dashed in and barked.

“My God, why does a woman want to go through this?” Bob growled, perspiration running down his whole body.

Dutch grabbed his hands. “Hold me! Hold me!” she begged.

Bob gave her every ounce of his strength he could. She made a mighty effort and with it a piercing cry, a baby appeared in the bed.

Bob was again a soldier in the army. He had his instructions and he followed them mechanically. He did what the instructions said to do. He made Dutch as comfortable as he could. He did what was necessary for the baby. He wrapped it in a blanket and placed it beside Dutch.

"We'll be all right until Mrs. Emerson comes," Dutch said almost gaily. She looked at him, love in her eyes. "You must be tired, darling."

"Tired!" he said. "I never felt less tired in my life. I feel wonderful! Dutch is that baby ours—your baby and mine?"

"Yes, dear!" Dutch was looking up at him wonderingly.

"Dutch, we were here alone in this house—just you and I. We were here miles from everyone, just the two of us. Now, Dutch, there are three of us."

"Yes, dear!" she said.

Bob stood wondering. "Dutch, don't you think we should do something? Dutch, someone came into this house. I felt it. You know how you do, you feel it when someone comes in? Colonel felt it. He went to the door. He came back wagging his tail like he was walking with someone. Dutch, we ought to have music, singing, dancing, a prayer. Something big has happened right here."

Dutch was watching him. "Yes, dear!" she said.

"Right out here on the prairie," Bob walked excitedly around. "Can I get you anything, darling? Oh, darling, I'm home again. Do you hear that? I'm home again. I'm not normal, Dutch, but I'm home again. I've found you, darling. I'll never leave you again. Darling, I must do something."

He stood a few seconds, then dropped to his knees beside Dutch's bed and with his arm around her he said. "Our Father who are in Heaven. Hallowed be thy name." He repeated the whole of the Lord's prayer; when he came to, "Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the Glory, Amen!" Dutch joined him, her voice one of thanksgiving.

Bob stood up. He looked around. He seemed dazed, "Dutch, why did I do that?"

Dutch did not answer.

Bob repeated, "Why did I do that?" Then he added, "Did you know, Dutch, that you need God when you are very happy? I never knew that before. I always thought of God as a help in trouble and sickness—but I wanted him, I needed him when I was so happy. I couldn't reach full joy without him."

"Yes, dear!" Dutch said.

There was the sound of the truck and voices. Ivor had returned with Mr. and Mrs. Emerson.

## ❧ XI ❧

BOB was in the kitchen with Ivor. He had made coffee and put everything he could find in the ice box and cupboard on the table for him to eat. After watching him for a few minutes, Bob realized that he was hungry, so he joined Ivor. He could not remember when food tasted so good, or when he had eaten so much of it, or when he had eaten in better company. Neither of them had made any sounds, except the sounds of eating and neither had done anything but pass food and glance up occasionally to grin. They had eaten of everything except one pie. Bob passed it to his guest.

Ivor put up the palms of both hands and sat back. He put his open hands on his stomach and

with a broad grin he shook his head. He took out his pipe. Bob got him a match. When he had his pipe going well Ivor glanced at the clock and stood up. Involuntarily they listened. They could hear rain beating on the window.

Bob got Ivor's coat. While he fastened it Bob took out a roll of bills. "How much?" he asked. He held out a bill.

Something came into the room, something that had not been there before. It cut across the warm current of feeling that gave a richness to that simple room and left it ordinary and commonplace.

Ivor's expression changed. He stepped back. His lips moved. He was feeling for words. After he had struggled for a minute, his hands up as if shoving something away, he managed, "I—neighbor!"

Bob felt humiliated and yet uplifted. He hesitated only a second and then he slapped Ivor's back. They shook hands. They laughed. Bob made Ivor sit down. He tip-toed into Dutch's room. Mrs. Emerson had told him he must keep out while Dutch rested, but he wanted something to send that girl in the shack, who was going to have a baby. Something pretty that she would not be able to buy. Dutch would know.

Dutch was asleep. Bob looked helplessly around. He couldn't see anything that looked suitable. He went to the bureau and opened a drawer. There were some of the daintiest and prettiest pink and

blue and white woolly baby things he had ever seen. He picked up a pair of bootees. He put one on each thumb and he was jerking them backward and forward like little feet kicking when he heard a gurgling laugh and Dutch asked, "Whatever are you doing?"

Bob felt a bit sheepish. He put the bootees back and explained what he wanted and the situation. "He won't take pay. He says he's our neighbor. I would like you to send his wife something for her baby."

"I will," Dutch said firmly. "Did you say she was depending on her hens to buy the baby clothes?"

"Yes. That's what made it so tough, losing the hens. They even lost several crates of eggs they had ready for market."

Little Dutch looked thoughtful. Quickly her face brightened. "Give her that little pink knitted coat and bonnet and bootees. I made them for our baby but Mrs. Emerson knitted some for him too, and he doesn't need them all."

Bob held up the woolly things with which he had been playing. "These the ones?"

"Yes." Little Dutch looked tired but added, "There is a crate of eggs in the old house. The eggs are just inside the door. It is not locked. Tell Ivor to take them as he goes out. You don't need to go with him. He can't miss them."

"You're a darling. You think of everything." Bob was looking tenderly down at her. She smiled and closed her eyes. She was asleep.

Bob took the woolly garments and carried them out to the kitchen. He got a paper and began to wrap them up.

Ivor walked over to the table and touched them with the tips of his fingers. His expression was tender and solemn. When Bob handed them to him he stepped back. Bob shouted as we do at those who do not understand, "For your baby." He motioned toward Little Dutch's room. He took the parcel that Ivor was holding helplessly and shoved it into the pocket of his coat.

To Bob's surprise Ivor stood perfectly still for a full minute. Then his lips trembled and he rubbed his hand across his eyes. As soon as he gained his composure, he made Bob understand that his head ached, he had been trying so hard to think of something for Tara, his wife. He wanted something that would make her happy, something that would make her forget that she was lonely among strangers and that the flood took their hens. He touched the parcel with the wee garments and implied that it would do all that.

Mr. Emerson came into the kitchen. He was carrying the baby. He motioned to Ivor to look at it. Ivor approached shyly and then put out his arms. Mr. Emerson put the baby in them. Ivor felt the

tiny hand and it closed around his big thumb. He grinned and looked at Bob. He signed that he was going to take the baby.

Bob laughed and a strange emotion shot through his heart. He wouldn't part with that tiny creature for a million dollars. He would give his life for that little mite. He stood very still. This was the very thing he had been afraid of. This was the thing he had been trying to escape. It had him in its tender but steellike embrace, a love that would never let him go.

In a kind of a daze Bob went out and saw Ivor off. He explained to him where he could get the case of eggs. He said he would go with Ivor to get it. But it was raining and Ivor objected. He said he could get it. Bob returned and went into the living room. Mr. Emerson was there alone.

"That's a fine fellow, Bob," he said.

"Yes, a splendid fellow," Bob agreed.

"What's his name?" Mr. Emerson asked.

"I don't know anything but Ivor."

Mr. Emerson reached into his pocket for his tobacco pouch. "You've a beautiful little son, Bob."

"Yes," Bob agreed.

Mr. Emerson saw that Bob's thoughts were on other things and he kept silent as he filled his pipe.

Bob, who was walking restlessly up and down the room suddenly stopped in front of the minister and shouted, "I've got it, Emerson. I've got it!"

Mr. Emerson merely looked sympathetic and waited.

Bob punched Mr. Emerson's chest with the first finger of his right hand. "You know what I wanted? Something that would unite all men, of all colors, of all nations and of all creeds. This is it, Emerson. You saw Ivor? We can't talk to each other, but Ivor and I know each other. We'd fight for each other. Why? Because, we got together about life. That's the thing to draw all men together, get all men working together to find out what life is, where it is, and why it is? That's a big enough job isn't it? Didn't you see we wanted to give each other things?"

Mr. Emerson hesitated before he said, "It's the old, old story, Bob."

"Maybe it is," Bob agreed, "but it has a different meaning to me. Don't you see, Emerson, the pioneers who came to this country came to get food, shelter and clothing. Those were the first essentials. Our ancestors soon had everything they needed, but the trouble was they began to think that the purpose of life is to get food, shelter and clothing. They not only wanted what they needed at the moment, but they wanted to store up things so their children would not need to work."

"You are right there," Mr. Emerson agreed.

"Many people still think that is the purpose of life," Bob continued. "But when science shows us how to use atomic energy, everyone will have all

he needs. And Emerson, you know it is a law of life that we must struggle or die. What will there be to struggle for when—”

“I’ve thought of that,” Mr. Emerson interrupted.

“I saw it tonight when I was talking to Ivor.” Bob was walking excitedly around the room. “Emerson, don’t you see? Ivor and I had no language to convey our thoughts, but we didn’t need it. We were both interested in life. I could give him things that he needed, but what we were interested in was life.”

“What are you getting at?” Mr. Emerson asked.

“This is a seven day a week proposition. It’s all mixed up with making our living. We will be living to find out what life is, where life is and why life is. It will give us something worth while to do.”

“Certainly worth while,” Mr. Emerson agreed with enthusiasm.

“Don’t you see, Emerson!” Bob was so excited he stammered a bit. “It’s as plain as day to me now. Man is creative. His body creates—his mind must create. It’s what he’s made for. His mind must direct and vitalize the creative urge he has inside of him. But, Emerson, his mind must do more. His mind must now turn on itself. That’s where we’ve reached now. We must find out what man is, why he is.”

Mr. Emerson began to walk around. “You have something there, Bob. Man is never satisfied

until his creative hunger gets the food it can digest. It may be something he wants to create with his body, it may be something he must create with his mind."

"That's the idea," Bob slapped Mr. Emerson's back. "That's the idea. Think of it, Emerson! Everybody making a living so that our bodies and minds will have the environment in which we can produce the best that is in us. We will not be working for things in themselves, but for the things that will help us use our creative power to the full, and don't misunderstand, Emerson, we're going to have a wonderful time doing it. This world is going to be happier than it has ever been."

"It's a wonderful dream, Bob."

"It isn't a dream," Bob threw a log on the fire. He straightened up and began to gesticulate. "I don't mean that ordinary chaps like I am can walk right out on faith. God doesn't expect that. He knows how we are made. He made us and he can't shift the responsibility onto our shoulders and he doesn't want to. He let us into the secret of the earth when he saw we were going to wreck civilization. He said, 'Here you fools, you're killing each other and you don't know what you're killing. You don't know what man is, you don't know where he came from, where he is going or why he is here.' What have you brains for? Get busy and use them on that problem now that you have the earth reduced

to energy and man on the verge of extinction. You'll find something there to tax the best you have and all you have."

"You make God seem very human, Bob."

"That's the way I see him now," Bob said simply. "Mighty human and also divine, and you know He says we were made in His image."

Bob was slapping the doubled fist of his right hand into the palm of his left. "Ivor and I didn't need to know each other. We didn't need to have a common language. Emerson, if the world was struggling to discover what life is, we wouldn't fight. We'd all work together, each nation glad when the other made a contribution to the sum total of knowledge."

"Might be," Emerson acknowledged. "Might be!"

Bob was thinking of Ivor. "Ivor wanted to help me and I wanted to help him. Our problem was too big to be hampered by language or nationality or color. Emerson, that is what the world has reached. Our problems are too big to let them be hampered by language or color or nationality. We've got to brush all those things aside and work together, or we perish!"

"It's not simple," Mr. Emerson said.

"It is simple," Bob interrupted. "It's—"

They were interrupted by a knock at the door that opened and Job stepped in. He stood a second

or two, blinking in the light, and then said, "You know what, Boss?"

"No, I don't know," Bob growled. "What are you doing here?"

"Sarah left me so I came back to raise hogs. I can raise hogs all right."

"Sure you can," Bob agreed, "but I didn't tell you you could raise them here."

Job blinked, looked more surprised than usual and said, "I've been living in the old house and I've saved you a lot."

"What are you talking about?" Bob was impatient.

Job stepped further into the kitchen with confidence in what he had to say. "You know that fellow with the truck, Boss?"

"Yes, I know him. What about him?"

"He was stealing a crate of eggs out of the old house, but I didn't let him get away with it. I let him have one in the eye and he kind of staggered and I kicked him out."

"You did!" There was such passion in Bob's voice it seemed to fill the whole house.

Job evidently realized there was something wrong for he talked faster. "I know some of his gibberish and I told him we didn't want any damned foreigners around here."

"You told him that?" Bob was approaching Job, who was backing up.

“Yes, Boss, and it looks like he was stealing the baby’s clothes. I found these on the floor.” He held the woolly garments, soiled by a heavy muddy boot, between them.

“Get out!” There was menace in Bob’s voice. “Get out before I kill you!”

## ❧ XII ❧

I'M a coward!"

Dutch laughed. "I'm frightened, too," she confessed, "but I don't think we are cowards."

"I counted so much on the way Ivor and I got along as an example of how the different nations could get together if they really wanted to. Now if that can be upset by an ignorant fool like Job, I'll feel—I'll feel—"

"Don't let us think about it," Dutch interrupted. She was wrapping a shawl around the baby.

Bob looked uncertainly at her. "Hadn't you better let mother keep baby? It will tire you to hold him."

"We may need him."

Bob looked puzzled, but he made no further objections. He drove in silence along the road that finally led to the shack where Ivor and Tara lived. "That is their place." He stopped the car.

Dutch looked at him. "Do you want to run away?"

"I do," Bob confessed. Perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"If Ivor is big enough he will see that we cannot let narrow-minded fools like Job turn us against each other."

"It's pretty tough to be called a damned foreigner in the only country you have, to be told that when you are giving your best."

"If only they understood our language we could—"

Bob started the car. "I guess we've got to face it." He turned off the road and up the lane.

Ivor was building a chicken house. He looked at them but went on with his work.

Bob stepped out of the car and shouted but Ivor made no response. In an undertone Bob muttered, "He's going to be tough."

Dutch stepped out with the baby and the bag that held the necessities for it. She went straight to the house and knocked firmly at the door. Tara opened it but stood in the doorway. Dutch felt in the bag, took out the baby's bottle that was full of

milk and asked if she might heat it. She pointed toward the stove.

Tara allowed her to go in but there was no warmth in her manner.

Dutch showed her that she wished some hot water in which to put the bottle.

Tara got it for her.

When Dutch thought it was warm enough she held it against her neck to test it. It was all right and she gave it to her baby who drank moderately.

There was a weak cry from a basket that stood behind the table. Dutch walked over and looked down at a thin emaciated baby that appeared half starved. As soon as Dutch finished feeding little Bob she handed him to Tara and picked up the other baby. She asked Tara if she might feed it. Tara nodded.

Just then Ivor and Bob entered. They all saw that wee fellow grasp for the bottle. He knew what he wanted and he guzzled it. They all laughed but there was a catch in their voices.

This broke down some of the strain in their relationship but it was not enough. The free good-fellowship felt the night little Bob was born had not returned.

Suddenly Bob looked around that little home, but what he was seeing was not that house. He was seeing the place where the bomb had been tested and proven. He was seeing the terrible destruction,

the great hole in the earth, empty, the very earth itself gone. He looked at Dutch and Tara, each with a baby in her arms.

In his imagination he saw the millions of men of all colors and creeds, in this weary world, standing dumbly beside their wives and babies asking, begging to be told how to protect them. He heard men in power talking of agreements, their enthusiasm dulled by the memory of broken oaths and discarded scraps of paper. He heard men demanding land and oil and power while from behind them came the sinister whispers from the depths of mines where men were digging the uranium that would destroy not only men and things but the very earth itself.

All this swept over him in its terrible reality. A feeling of helpless, hopeless loneliness filled his world. He was too small to cope with this thing. Civilization, the very earth itself had reached the end of the road. There was no use in men struggling any longer. Let them eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow—"

He was recalled to his surroundings by a wail from Ivor's baby. The bottle had slipped from its mouth. He looked at the emaciated, squirming bit of life but strangely, what he saw was not Ivor's baby. What he saw was Buffer. Buffer crawling into the jaws of death. Buffer giving his life that others might live and live more abundantly. Then Buffer on his way, tossing back a star. Buffer was no doubt

a squirming mite like Ivor's baby once, but he had lived big. He had found something worth dying for.

Bob looked again at the babies. He mumbled, "Something worth dying for!" A strange expression came into his face. He shouted, "It's not enough! It's not enough! They must have something worth living for. We must give them something worth living for. We must give them the new world that has been promised."

He stood very still. His face lighted up. He began to breathe fast. He shouted, "I have it. I have the secret that will beat the bomb. I have it." He began to walk up and down. His eyes shone. Power radiated from him and filled the room as he talked and gesticulated.

At first the others looked at him in surprise. Then some of his excitement reached them. Unconsciously they moved closer, Tara and Dutch first, then Ivor. They knew he was talking about the babies and about them and about the world. They knew his talk was big although much they did not understand. Even Dutch did not grasp it all but she felt a power in him she had never felt before as he tried to explain, that as he saw it, men have not quite grown up. To breed and trade and gather things is not enough for men who are ready to give their lives. Men must have something bigger and finer to struggle for or they will die.

Always as he talked he came back to the babies. Over and over he made it clear that they must give those wee fellows not something worth dying for but something worth living for. How long he talked he never knew but suddenly Ivor stepped forward and put out his hand. They held—looking deeply into each other's hearts for a full minute, while tears ran unchecked down the faces of Dutch and Tara.

Of course Dutch explained to Tara how to feed her baby. She left the bottle with her. She gave her the little woolly garments and the eggs. They arranged for Ivor and Tara to visit them the following Sunday.

Bob and Dutch were very silent on the way home. They found Mr. Emerson's car in the yard. "I'm glad they are here," Bob said.

Mrs. Emerson came out and collected wee Bob. As she carried him into the house she looked over her shoulder to say, "Nat and Star are on their way. They will be here for supper."

"I'm glad," Dutch said heartily.

"So am I," Bob echoed. "We are going to remember this day."

And that was how it was. After supper, when they were sitting around the grate fire Bob said simply, "I know the secret. I know how to defeat the bomb."

Mr. Emerson, who was sitting in a comfortable chair looked in some surprise at his host, who was standing on the hearth. He got up and walked to the other side of the fireplace so that his face and Bob's were above the glare and uncertain flickering light of the flames. "What is it Bob? What have you found?"

Bob spoke with confidence but also with humility. "I saw it this afternoon. I don't know why or how but I did. I saw that the troubles of the world are the growing pains of civilization. Men have refused to grow up. They are clinging to the ideals of childhood. They must change their ideals. It is the only thing that will save us."

"I don't get you," Nat interjected.

Star twisted in her chair and Mrs. Emerson dropped her knitting in her lap.

"Let me begin at the beginning." Bob threw a log on the fire. As he bent down so that the light shone in his face there was a sudden hush in the room. In his face was something that had not been there before. A strange tense excitement filled the room and they all leaned forward.

Bob continued, "God made man in His image, so I reckon he meant man to aim to be like him. But man has got side-tracked. He got so busy getting food, clothing and shelter that he began to think that is what man is made for. Worse than that man has begun to think things are more important than

man. I don't need to tell you that the cheapest thing in the world is human life."

"You don't need to tell me," Star clasped her hands around her knees and leaned far forward. "Go on, Bob."

"Well, the Big Father got mightily bothered about it. He could see folks in such a frenzy for things, they were all going to the devil in a big way. So he thought it over and he said to himself, there was never a time in the history of the world when so many people were anxious to do something big and fine. There was never a time when so many people were willing to make real sacrifices for the betterment of others. And because he knew a little light will drive away much darkness, he decided he'd have to depend on those few to save civilization."

"I agree with you, Bob, there are millions of people who want to do something to save civilization, but they don't know what to do," Star jumped up and began to walk around excitedly. "But go on if you have anything to tell us."

"So the Big Father said he'd let folks split the atom. He'd hand them the wealth of the world or immediate destruction. They would have to choose."

"You haven't solved anything," Nat said and he stretched lazily. "If people have all that wealth, it will destroy them just as surely as the bomb and war would. People must struggle to live. That is the way we are made."

"Granted," Bob said with a laugh. "That is the point I am making. Food, shelter and clothing must be merely the equipment that makes people more capable of the struggle we are now faced with."

"What is that struggle?" Mr. Emerson asked.

"It is the struggle to know man. What do we know about him? The most mysterious and magnificent of God's creations and we know less about him than we know about pure-bred horses and cattle. Our food, clothing and shelter, I insist, must be merely equipment to enable us to discover what man is, where he came from, where he is going and what the purpose of life is. Can you think of any more splendid ideal, anything more likely to draw all men of all nations together?"

"You maybe have something there," Nat drawled. "The doctors and the scientists and even some preachers are getting together and I've heard there are discoveries in the offing that will make the atomic bomb look insignificant, unimportant."

"I shouldn't wonder," Bob agreed. "Ever since the night my son was born I have realized there is some living force in this world—call it Life, God, whatever you like—that is worth living for and I'm going to live for it."

"For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; for not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life," Mr. Emerson quoted slowly.

"What is that? Where did you get that?" Bob asked.

"It is a verse from Corinthians."

"Say it again," Bob urged.

Mr. Emerson repeated: "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; for not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

"That's the idea exactly," Bob agreed heartily. "That's the idea, but I don't expect to groan. I expect to have a lot of real joy out of life."

Well, that started an argument and it was a late hour when at last Star went home with Mr. and Mrs. Emerson to spend the night in their home. Bob went with Nat to the room he had occupied before and they did not need words to tell how happy they were to be together again.

When Bob returned to the living room, Little Dutch was sitting on the chesterfield before the fire. Bob sat down beside her and drew her into his arms. "Happy, darling?" he asked as he held her close.

"Never so happy before," she said. "And you?"

Bob chuckled. "You won't laugh if I tell you something?"

"Of course I won't," Dutch nestled closer.

"When I was a young chap just beginning to go out to parties I was sometimes a bit late getting home. Nearly always when I got in I heard my father say, 'Who is that?'"

“ ‘It’s all right, dear. Go to sleep’,” mother would answer. ‘It’s Bob coming home’.”

“Dad would grunt contentedly, turn over and mumble, ‘Bob has come home.’ In a second he would be asleep, satisfied that all was well when he had his family under his roof.”

“I can remember your dad doing that one night I was here,” Dutch said.

Bob pressed her hand to his lips. “Darling, tonight, I heard the Big Father say, ‘Who is that,’ and dearest, you answered.”

“I answered,” Little Dutch said with shining eyes. “I answered, darling, and I said, ‘Bob has come home’.”







RUTH MY	6'74
MAY	JUNE

DATE	11/11/19
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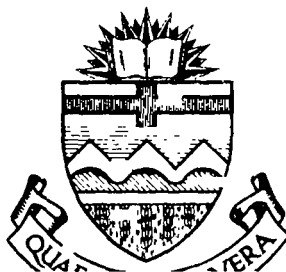
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